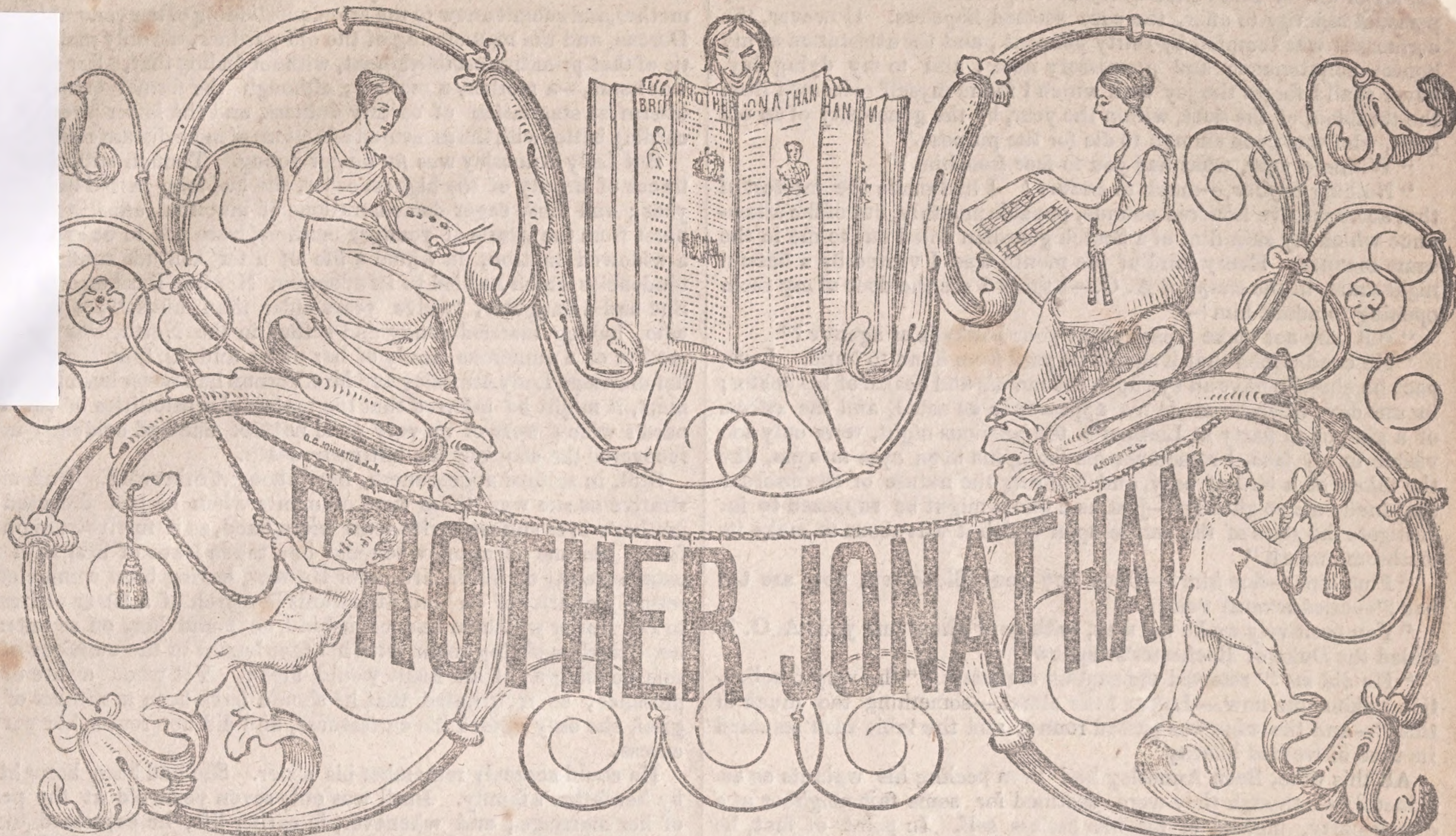


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A B E D N E G O,
THE MONEY-LENDER.
Gore, Catherine Grace Frances
By Mrs. Gore. *(Moody)*

FIRST AMERICAN EDITION.

CHAPTER I.

"Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth."—*Shakespear.*

DURING the uproar of excitement, rejoicing, prodigality of pleasure, splendor, riot and intemperance, which attended the ratification of peace, after the downfall of Napoleon, there appeared in London a mysterious personage who soon distinguished himself and became very eminent among that numerous and respectable class of capitalists who advertise "MONEY TO BE ADVANCED TO NOBLEMEN OR GENTLEMEN ON THE MOST FAVORABLE TERMS." This person was in a short time singularly familiar to the young spendthrifts of the universities and the Guards, and his advertisements directed the reader to a certain A. O., to whom reference was to be made by letter, addressed to the Hungerford Coffee-house. There was a tone of respectability in the phrasing of these manifestoes. They had the air of proceeding from some gentlemen with a large floating capital, and no great faith in government securities, anxious to obtain good interest and a safe investment for his money,—perhaps for the benefit of a deserving wife and numerous family. People reduced for the first time to the shame of borrowing, said to themselves, "A. O. is my man!" There was far less humiliation in addressing a letter to the Hungerford Coffee-house, than in being seen entering the door of notorious money-brokers in Cork street or Pall Mall.

But it was observed that no man after a similar application, was ever known to refer his friend to the same source of relief. No one talked about A. O.,—no one admitted that he had any cognizance of this mysterious personage. Or if, in an orgie of thoughtless boys about to repair to the gambling table, or confessing the ill luck of the previous night and its results, some novice suggested the well advertised name of A. O., every one present appeared anxious to change the conversation. Each had instantly some pet usurer to recommend. Still, not a soul was positively heard to say, "*Beware of A. O.!*" A charm seemed attached to the name, so averse were even the most hardened thirsters after the pocket's blood to pronounce those direful initials. However prompt to revile the originators of all other ad-

vertisements of a similar description, as legitimate descendants of Barabbas, no one whispered a syllable against A. O. Discriminating persons may, perhaps, infer from this, that most of these cautious friends were in his power!

At a dinner at the Guard's Club in St. James's street, early in the autumn of 1822, it was observed that, discussion having arisen concerning recent losses at play, at Graham's renowned Temple of Chance, where, at that moment, fortunes were winning and losing with fearful rapidity, the countenance of a young officer, who had hitherto listened to such allusion with perfect unconcern, became singularly agitated. It was noticed with the more surprise, because Basil Annesley never entered the doors of Graham's, and bore no relationship to any one of the parties whose affairs were thus freely canvassed.

"Four thousand on Thursday night, and three thousand last week!" observed Colonel Loftus. "Poor Sir Grinsel! I'm afraid 'tis all up with him! He told me himself he had raised twelve thousand last month; and that he had not a resource left,—mortgaged to the last guinea,—every stick on his Irish estates gone!—Poor Sir Grinsel!"

"He has latterly had recourse to A. O.," added Captain Blencowe, in a grave under tone; "so one can understand the sort of straits to which he must be reduced."

"A. O.?—Why surely that is the person to whom my uncle, the Duke of Rochester, is said to owe thirty thousand pounds?"—cried a youngster who had lately joined, and was fond of citing his "uncle the duke," (a weakness of course hoaxed out of him before he had been six months in the regiment.)

"Ay, and out of whose clutches half the fellows you meet every day in St. James's street would be right glad to extricate themselves," retorted Captain Blencowe. "A. O. is the last resource of ruined men;—the executioner who gives the *coup de grace*."

"What the deuce do you mean by the *coup de grace*?"—demanded the lad so proud of being nephew to a duke.

"The *coup de grace*, is the stroke given to a victim on the wheel, to put him out of his pain," replied a grey matter-of-fact old colonel, who officiated as dry-nurse to the subalterns.

"I meant that A. O. was the blackguard who aims the first blow at ruined men; the sort of fellow to fling a stone at a drowning dog, scarcely able to keep his head above water."

"It was he, I fancy, who arrested Eggerston," observed Colonel Loftus.

"And it was a writ obtained by A. O. that drove Frederick Lumley to Brussels," rejoined Captain Blencowe. "A man must in short have exhausted all other resources, to have recourse to him. However, it must be added that he is unfailing at a pinch. The brute is always flush of cash; and, if one choose to rush into the jaws of a shark with one's eyes open, one is more to blame than the creature that follows its instincts by closing them upon one. I once borrowed

money of A. O. I had tried every other quarter.—A minor with only personal security to offer, the case seemed hopeless. However, the cormorant was tempted by thirty per cent., and the attestation of my honest countenance and premissory note; and to my dying day, never shall I forget the joy with which I found myself redeemed from the thralldom of the debt, within the year, by the generosity of an old aunt, who was good enough to die for the purpose."

"Within a year, what had you to fear from him?"

"Nothing to fear,—much to endure! I had made the interest of that accursed five hundred pounds, payable monthly, out of the allowance which my skin-flint of a Scotch guardian doled out to me in the same manner. Every third of the month was I visited by a hateful night-mare, in the shape of A. O.—I think I see the door of my room opening to admit him!"

"But why not make it payable at your banker's or agent's?"

"He conditioned that it should be paid from hand to hand. I suspect he chose to have an eye upon the morals and health of his debtor; for one day, when he made his appearance as usual, and the effects of a gin-punch party at Limmer's the previous night, were only too visible in my face, I remember his fixing his keen eyes into me, like the talons of a bird of prey, and inquiring the nature of the disorder that made me so ghastly:—just as a ghoul might be supposed to investigate the state of the corpse upon which it was about to make its loathsome repast."

"Fine him,—fine him!—Upon my soul, Blencowe, you are too bad!"—cried several voices.

"You positively make me sick, with your ghoul and your A. O.!" added the Duke of Rochester's nephew.

"He did me!" retorted the captain earnestly; "the very recollection sickens me now.—Loftus! the claret,—something too much of this!"—and the wine was passed round, and the table soon resumed its tone of wonted hilarity.

All this time, Basil Annesley had been peeling his walnuts as assiduously as though they were destined for some fair neighbor at a dinner party, instead of for his listless self. In point of fact, he knew not that he had so much as a walnut on his plate. Throughout the discussion, he had been all ear; and chose an occupation enabling him to listen with his face depressed, so as to conceal his deep interest in the matter.

But the very means he took to disguise his emotion, caused it to be noticed.—Basil Annesley was one of those open-spirited fellows, who confront the observation of society, with an ever frank and fearless countenance; and to find his forehead, usually held so high, thus pertinaciously incumbent, and his voice usually so free in discussion, thus perseveringly silent, excited surmises in the mind of Loftus, who sat opposite to him, as well as in the grey-headed colonel.

"What is the meaning of all this? Has poor Annesley been playing?" was the secret conjecture of both. "Another victim to *ecarte* or hazard!—Another victim for the remorseless claws of A. O.!"

Yet Annesley had never been noticed to enter a gambling house.—The play of fashionable London was not then concentrated into so decided a focus, as it has since become. But in a community so small as that to which Basil was attached, a man addicted to any grosser vice, is soon convicted; and he had hitherto passed for a lady's man,—an Almacks' pet,—rather than for a fellow likely to be carried away by the dissipations of *roue* life.

It was only a year, since Basil Annesley had joined the Guards. On quitting Harrow, he had completed his education at a foreign university; and soon afterwards, as the son of the late Sir Bernard Annesley, one of the bravest victims of the Peninsular war, had obtained a commission from the generous patronage of the Royal Commander-in-chief. Of the state of his fortunes, little was authentically known. From the period of the General's death, his mother had resided in retirement.

Situated within a mile of the New Forest, the ancient mansion inhabited by the widow of Sir Bernard Annesley resembled rather a moated farm-house than the cottages of gentility to which widows of moderate means are apt to retire to meet the exigencies of a small establishment. Concealed within the intricacies of a wooded country, attainable only by a detestable cross road or rather cross-lane cutting across the Forest from Lyndhurst, Barlingham Grange, or as it was abbreviated by the cottagers in the neighborhood, the Grange, was cut off from all communication with the active world; and Lady Annesley was so cold in her deportment, and so wedded to the solitude in which she had resolutely ensconced herself, that, but for the affectionate fervor of Basil's nature, it must have appeared a penance to him rather than a schoolboy's holiday, to journey twice a year from Harrow into Hampshire, and return thither for a couple of months, between the period of his quitting Heidelberg, and entering the army.

Accustomed, however, to ascribe the melancholy reserve of his surviving parent to affliction for the loss of his father, Basil respected her austere melancholy; and though in his boyhood there had been moments when, weary of flinging stones into the old moat to startle the dab-chicks from the reeds, and of contemplating the dilapidated pointed gables of the old brick mansion, he had almost wished he might not again set eyes on Barlingham,—he never returned thither

to be folded with momentary warmth to the heart of his grave mother, and submit anew to the cross-questioning of her venerable maid Dorcas, and the maundering of the old gardner, the only male domestic of that primitive establishment, without feeling that, after all, home was home,—a mother, a mother; although the former exhibited the uttermost stagnation of earthly dulness, and the latter a reserve according better with the measured affections of more distant relationship.

But Lady Annesley was no longer young. Though still exhibiting traces of beauty of the highest order, she had long passed her fiftieth year; and those eager demonstrations of maternal affections, which burst from the hearts of younger mothers, were not to be expected of a widowed matron, in whom a life of utter solitude confirmed the tendencies which had led to its adoption. Nor was Basil an only child. She had a daughter, twelve years older than himself; a daughter who, having married young and settled in the North, was now the mother of a numerous family of her own; and as, from the period of her marriage Lady Annesley and Mrs. Vernon had never been known to meet, it might be inferred that the maternal sensibilities of Sir Bernard's widow were of no very vivid nature. She had evidently never recovered the shock of his untimely death.

Still, in spite of appearances, Basil thought otherwise. Undemonstrative as she was, there were moments when he had detected his mother's eyes suffused with tears when fixed, as if furtively, upon his face. On one occasion, when she had taken leave of him with her usual serenity on his departure for Harrow, having been compelled to return a quarter of an hour afterwards in search of a letter addressed to Dr. Butler which he had left behind, he found her, on re-entering her cheerless sitting room, with her face buried in the cushions of her sofa, sobbing as if her heart would break. Yet when aware of his presence, as if irritated that he should have been a witness of her grief, she only chided his carelessness, and did not renew her parting caress.

He could scarcely remember his sister. She had been brought up by her father's family. Basil was only seven years old at the period of her marriage; and whenever, in earlier life, he expressed to his mother a wish to see Helena again, Lady Annesley replied, that they were not likely to meet, Mr. Vernon being an odd man; an equivocal phrase, implying little or much, according to the acceptance of the hearer. Basil had taken it for granted that his brother-in-law was a brute, who, on account of his sister's want of fortune, tyrannized over her, and kept her apart from her family. But as Mrs. Vernon, during their two or three interviews, had not deigned to bestow on him a single sisterly caress, he felt little indignation in her behalf; and had in fact almost ceased to recall to mind the existence of this estranged relative.

"It is really disgraceful that Helena should exhibit such unnatural indifference!" he once observed to his mother. "The result of bringing up a child under another's roof! Barlingham was never her home, and she has forgotten that it is that of her mother and brother."

A hectic flush tingled Lady Annesley's pale cheek at the observation, and Basil instantly repented his words; for he had now begun to surmise that the strict seclusion in which they lived, and the adoption of his eldest sister by his uncle, and a common origin—in the straitened means of his mother. It was strange indeed, that Admiral Annesley should not have selected, as the object of his favor, the son rather than the daughter of his deceased brother. But this might be easily accounted for. At the period of Sir Bernard's death, Basil was of an age to require the affectionate services of a mother; while Helena was nearly sixteen, her education completed. Moreover he flattered himself that Lady Annesley's partiality for her boy was not without its influence in the selection.

A portion of Basil's uncertainties concerning his mother, however, were now at an end. During his sojourn at Heidelberg, his own developed intelligence enabled him to detect, even in her grave and earnest letters, a tone of strong maternal affection, subdued as if by an effort of resolution; and on meeting her again, upon his return from Germany, his strengthened character and greater self-possession, gave him courage to indulge in such demonstrations of grateful filial tenderness as served in some measure to thaw the icy self-restraint of the widow. If she had not treated him more fondly during the two months he had spent at Barlingham, she had treated him more openly. She had avowed to him that she was not on friendly terms with his father's family,—not even on friendly terms with her daughter,—

"It matters not with whom the fault," said she, in answer to Basil's eager interrogatories. "Suffice it that the Annesley family include the son so dear to me in their displeasure against myself, and are consequently little likely to make overtures of kindness towards you. Oblige me, therefore, dearest Basil, by abstaining from all further reference to the subject."

On another point, she had been equally candid. She informed him that she was poor,—very poor; that her income of eight hundred a-year, derived in a great measure from her pension as the widow of a general officer, would only enable her to make him an allowance of three; that the little she could lay aside, was forming a fund for his future promotion; and that necessity, as well as choice, had induced her to make a hermitage of her retreat.

"All my desire, all my ambition, dearest Basil," said she, "is your advancement in life. My fate has been a sad one. I was wedded against my inclination. Your father's family caballed against me while he lived, and cast me off at his death; yet circumstances forbade me to refuse their offer to adopting Helen, for whom, indeed,—but no matter!—My happiness has been *you*, Basil; my consolation in *you*. For *you* have I lived; for *you* I hope, and am happy.—Deficient as you may have sometimes fancied me in tenderness, so dear have you ever been to me, that, had I lost you, I would not, I *could* not have survived! In your well-being, my very existence is bound up. Become what I expect of you,—a man—a man of honor,—a prudent man, endowed with the esteem of society,—and my old age may perhaps still enjoy the peace and honor denied to my youth.—But falter in the path,—disgrace yourself,—and I shall become a widow indeed!"

A warm embrace sealed the compact between them, which Basil long promised himself to hold sacred; and again and again, previous to his embarkation in London life, had poor Lady Annesley dwelt solemnly upon the fact that, possessing only a life income, should he involve himself in debt, she would be unable to afford him relief.

"Think," she had said to him at parting, "think, dearest Basil, what would be the distress, the despair, of this tranquil little household, over which the quiet years have been rolling away unfelt, should any mischance befall you! Govern your conduct, my dear son, by the conviction, that disgrace to you would convey death to your mother!"

And after all this, with the impression still strong on his mind of the noble dignity of that mild woman, and the strong motherly love mysteriously concealed under her solemn deportment, he had done evil,—he was in debt,—and for present relief he had already resolved to refer himself to the interposition of A. O., THE MONEY LENDER!—

CHAPTER II.

"Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?"—*Shakspeare.*

Long and tedious did the hours appear to Basil Annesley, which served on the morrow to convey a post-paid letter to the Hungerford Coffee-house, and bring back a reply from the individual so bitterly condemned by his Club.

Three times in the course of the day, did he return home to his lodgings, in hopes the post might have brought an answer which, he trusted, would afford a first step of extrication from the difficulties in which he had wantonly involved himself. Still he was disappointed. On his table were divers notes and letters;—some of invitation;—some endited with the clerkly precision announcing, only too painfully to the conscious debtor, strong hints that his earliest convenience must convey a settlement to some expectant creditor:—but not a syllable from A. O.!

In the evening, he had an engagement; and, just as, full-dressed, but with his spirits in complete dishabille, he was quitting his lodgings, the double rap of the last evening post, caused the door of his small dwelling to vibrate, and Basil to recoil a step or two in the passage, while his servant offered the ignominious towpence in exchange for a shabby-looking missive, which was to convey tidings of life or death to the delinquent.

The interview was accorded. "The following day, at noon;"—the place, obscure and strange enough,—No. 21 Greek street, Soho.

During his sojourn in London, he had probably traversed Greek street, Soho, fifty times, without noting more than that it contained the usual double lines of tedious unmeaning brick-houses peculiar to English streets;—diversified only by varieties of Insurance plates,—the Phoenix, or the Sun-fire,—or exhibiting the interesting F. P., prating of the whereabouts of their fire-plugs. But now, every house appeared instinct with meaning. Its glaziers' or grocers' shops, were not as the shops of other glaziers and grocers; and on arriving within a few doors of the number specified by A. O.'s communication, he began to count the houses, the earlier to familiarize himself with the "complement external" of the Money-lender's habitation.

It was one of those square roomy mansions, which still announce that Soho was a fashionable quarter of the town, when the higher classes, taking sudden fright at the insalubrity of the banks of the river,—till the reign of the Second James their favorite residence,—migrated as far as possible from the influence of its miasma. The door, ill-fitted to its shrunk disjunct case, was of that dingy ochrous complexion, peculiar to the loungers of the Cheltenham promenades; and even the worn-out and broken caneblinds of the parlor were so closely surmounted by closed shutters, as to preclude all idea that the house was inhabited. It sounded hollow as the grave, when, in spite of appearances, Basil hazarded a modest knock and gentler ring!—

Promptly, however, as at some well-lacquered lordly mansion, the summons was answered. An old woman of crippled shape, and having a complexion many degrees darker than her tawny front and the dirty fly-cap that surmounted it, opened and held wide open the door, not as if awaiting his inquiries, but as though he were expected and had only to enter. A glance at his feet, as hinting a hope that the door-scraper had not been overlooked, was all she vouchsafed him.

"In the back parlor," croaked her discordant voice, before he had

recovered self-possession enough to ask a question; and he saw that he was to make his own way in this desolate temple of echoes. With his heart beating more irregularly than he would have cared to own to his friend Blencowe, Basil accordingly advanced along the wide but bare and dirty passage, and knocked at the second door, which was slightly ajar. No one replied;—and he accordingly pushed it open, and went in.

CHAPTER III.

"Let him who wants to know the value of money, try to borrow some."
Popular Proverb.

THE chamber into which Basil had thus unceremoniously introduced himself, though empty, had all the appearance of having been recently occupied. Volumes of sulphurous yellow smoke ascended from a black mass of coals in the rusty grate, interspersed with damp shavings, in token that some effort at least had been made to ignite them; and an old-fashioned bureau standing open against the wall, exhibited files of papers, and one or two open letters, besides a compact phalanx of diminutive rouleaux, apparently of sterling value.—Soon after Basil had seated himself, the Money-lender made his appearance. There was nothing, however, very remarkable in his person. Though above the middle height, a certain ignoble character of form and gesture deprived him of the advantages usually inseparable from a commanding stature. His dress, if neither coarse nor rusty, was of an inferior cut; and though his dark eyes might have passed for intelligent in the head of any other man, there was a discrepancy between the blackness of their tint, enhanced by the profuse black eyelashes and eyebrows by which they were overhung, and the scanty grey curls almost approaching to white, that figured on either side a head, the crown of which was bare and lustrous. It was, in short, a face and figure, which, in squalid attire, with a beard and a slouched hat, would have passed muster among the itinerant dealers in old clothes, whose cries disturb the inhabitants of the West End, at an hour when none but Jews, fish-women, chickweed boys, scavengers' carts, and twopenny postmen, are astir in the slumberous streets of the more civilized quarters of the town.

Almost the first words which this singular individual addressed to Basil, was to impart to him the information that he (A. O.) in dealing with all classes of the people, had laid it down as a rule to place confidence only in those who showed confidence in him."

"In addressing myself to one known to me only by the initials of A. O., I did not feel bound to disclose more than my own of B. A.," replied the young soldier, gravely.

"Mine are pretty universally known to express my real name," replied the Money-lender. "I am called Abednego Osalez; and as this is the first time, I fancy, we have done business together. I must enquire whether you bring me no letter of recommendation from some other of my clients?"

"From no one," replied Basil, spontaneously recalling to mind the unsatisfactory terms in which the very clients on which he pinned his reliance, treated him in his absence.

"It is merely my newspaper advertisements, then, which have attracted your notice?"

"Not altogether," replied Annesley. "More than one of my brother officers have been extricated from pecuniary difficulty by your assistance. From them, I became aware of your mode of business; and—"

"Did they not also add," interrupted the Money-lender, "their exhortations that you should not apply to *me*, unless your case were desperate? Did they not tell you, if any other earthly resource be open to you, beware of A. O.? Did they not call me shark, cormorant, vulture, usurer, Jew? You know they did! Not a mess of any regiment in the service in which I am not thus opprobriated."

Basil, who already repented his indiscretion, in having allowed the words "brother officers," to escape him, as too clearly indicative of his social position, would not, by an affirmative reply, hazard the exposure of his friends to the vindictive reprisals of such an enemy as A. O.

"You are cautious, young gentleman!" observed the Money-lender, whose large dark eyes seemed to penetrate the most hidden thoughts of his companion. "Caution, however, is not the parent of confidence. You come to *me* in the hope of opening my strong-box; and will scarcely accomplish the exploit with close lips and a closer heart. A calling such as mine necessitates some degree of mystery; but when once a *bona-fide* negotiation commences, all must be above-board,—all truth and daylight. I have told you my name is Abednego Osalez. I now ask the favor of your own?"

Still, Basil hesitated. He could not bear to disgrace the honorable patronymic borne by the object of his filial veneration, by inscription in the registers of a Jew!

"You will be pleased to remember," resumed the Money-lender, "that no act can be authentic between us, unless the business be negotiated under our real names. If, therefore, you scruple to intrust me with yours, this interview has lasted too long already."

Apprehending, from his decided mode of uttering these words, that the peremptory Jew was about to rise and dismiss him, the agitated applicant murmured, in a low voice, "My name, sir, is Annesley."

"Annesley?"—reiterated the Money-lender, as if requiring him to be more articulate. "Basil Annesley."

The Jew rose with some precipitation from his seat; and, for a moment or two, occupied himself in turning over the papers lying open on his bureau, as if in search of writing materials, to enable him to take notes of the business of his new client.

"You have lately, I believe, entered the Grenadier Guards?"—said he, still addressing Annesley, but without turning round.

"I have been rather more than a year in the army."

"And during that short space of time, you have contrived to embarrass yourself?"

"Many contrive to do so in less than a twentieth part of it!" replied Basil, as if resolved not to be brow-beaten by a stranger.

"Not the well-conditioned son of a mother in straitened circumstances," replied the insolent Jew, who seemed endowed with an intuitive insight into the position of his new client.

"I applied to you, sir, as a Money-lender, not as a counsellor," said Basil, haughtily, now rising in his turn. "My business may be briefly explained,—I am, as you seem to be aware, the only son of the late Sir Bernard Annesley. I have immediate necessity for a sum of £350.—My allowance of three hundred a year—"

"She allows you three hundred a-year?—too much—too much for her to give, or you to receive!" muttered the Jew, in indistinct tones, of which, however, not a syllable escaped the ear of Annesley.

"I observed, sir, that my allowance of three hundred a-year, and my pay," persisted Basil, not noticing his interruption, "would enable me to pay you off, by monthly instalments, both interest and principal, in the course of the next two years and a half."

"And should you die in the interim, young gentleman, what security have I, pray, for my money?"—demanded the usurer with a sneer.

"Surely I could effect an insurance on my life, assigning you the policy?" inquired Basil, in a less assured voice.

"You have very soon become familiar with the expedients of an embarrassed man," murmured the Jew,—still, without turning towards him, but apparently engrossed by the money and arrangement of the papers on his bureau.

"I was informed by a brother officer that such was the mode in which you had arranged a similar matter for himself," replied Basil, with increasing hesitation.

"Captain Blencowe, eh?—ay! I remember Six years ago, however! Your friend has a good memory,—so have I: and I admit that he redeemed the debt like a gentleman, some time within the term of his acceptance."

"I should be glad to convince you that you would obtain in myself a client equally honorable," rejoined Basil, somewhat reassured.

"The will may not be wanting, but I doubt the means. Young Blencowe belonged to a moneyed family.—I knew with whom I had to deal. Were you to fail me, I might put the whole Annesley family into thumb-screws, without eliciting so much as a ten-pound note in your behoof. Persons of my occupation, sir, are forced to keep a pretty accurate tariff of the fortunes and consciences of those likely to come within their line of business. I had a relative of yours, one of the Yorkshire Annesleys, two years in the King's Bench at my expense."

"But I concluded he paid you at last?" demanded Basil, too ignorant of the connectionship of his father's family, to refute any such accusation.

"With his life.—He died in prison, leaving me the creditor of heirs who were penniless."

Strange to tell, there was a tone of triumph rather than a vexation, in the Money-lender's mode of alluding to this frustration of his interests.

"But I, who am both young and solvent," persisted Basil, "do not intend to defraud you, either by living or dying. I give you my word of honor as a gentleman, that—"

"The word of honor of a gentleman, has no value, and should have no mention in a money-dealing transaction," interrupted the Jew.—"The affair between us is simply one of speculation. You want money; I have to sell it to you, as much as possible to my own advantage. I must therefore either have good security and fair interest; or without security, such interest as may induce me to incur the risk."

"I have already offered you the latter alternative," said Basil, bluntly.

"I have been offered two hundred per cent. by needy men before now," replied the Money-lender, with a curl of the lip, "and without swallowing the bait. The mere promise of a stranger is not exactly worth its weight in gold. In the first place, Mr. Annesley, have you even so much as reflected upon the amount of the interest of your debt, and keeping up the policy of insurance, besides the expense of the execution of the deed, added to the sinking fund for the gradual defrayment of the three hundred and fifty pounds?"—demanded the pragmatical Jew.

"I am in the receipt of four hundred and thirty pounds a year," replied Basil, evasively.

"And for what purpose is it assigned to you?" retorted the Money-lender. "To afford you a becoming position in the world!—What

right, therefore, have you to alienate this provision, so as to deprive yourself of the necessities of your sphere of society, and become exposed to the shame of petty embarrassments?"

"None!" replied Basil, astounded at the inexplicable liberties taken by his new acquaintance, yet not daring to resent remonstrances apparently indicative of favorable dispositions towards him. "But the shame to which I may expose myself by the limitation of my income, is surely nothing compared with that which would befall me a month hence, when my acceptances fall due, and I am unable to do them honor."

"But you are still a minor?" remonstrated the Jew.

"Those who were satisfied with my endorsements, asked no questions, contenting themselves with the engagement of a gentleman, the son of a man of honor," replied Basil with firmness.

"At least," said he, fixing his dark eyes approvingly upon the ingenuous countenance of young Annesley, "at least there was value received for these bills of exchange? You are not applying to me for the means of covering another usurious transaction? Do not deceive me, young sir; for through my extensive connexions with the moneyed world, I have the means of ascertaining the truth to a guinea."

"I have no disposition to deceive you, Mr. Abednego Osalez," replied young Annesley, with some hauteur; "but if I came not hither to seek a counsellor, still less am I disposed to find a confessor in my man of business. The purpose for which I require these funds, regards you as little as the mode by which you have acquired them, so as to enable you to supply me, regards myself. I ask no questions: let me advise you to be equally discreet."

"There is no occasion for you to ask questions!"—said his singular companion, continuing to examine his papers, and file them carefully, all the time he was speaking. They are answered for you without inquiry. The world has explanations stereotyped to your hand. Every body knows the Money-lender to be a Jew—the Jew a usurer—the usurer a criminal in the eye of the law. Christ drove the money-changers from his Temple: man expels them from his tribunals. The money-lending Jew is one who *must* have acquired his funds by extortion and fraud; one who probably began life as a Corsair—pickpocket—resurrection man—assassin—no matter what amount of obloquy you heap upon his head!—He cannot have too narrowly escaped the hands of the hangman! He cannot be too grossly stigmatized, he has caused the ruin of thousands—

And if a man have need of poison now,

Here lives the caitiff wretch would sell it him!

Admit that I portray myself as you have heard me portrayed? Why therefore *should* you institute *further* inquiries into my conduct or its motives?"

Basil Annesley was startled out of all self-possession by this strange appeal. From the first few words uttered by his new acquaintance, he had been impressed by the superiority of his tone and phraseology not only to his garb and mode of life, but to a calling affording inducements for such base disguise as that which had first brought them into collision. But now, the unexpected eloquence of his words and sudden energy of his gestures, were characteristic of the scholar and the gentleman, rather than of the vulgar Jew,—the jobbing money-broker!—Poor Basil almost quailed under the vivid glances of the excited man who gave utterance to this petulant apostrophe.

"I have, I admit, heard you ungraciously spoken of," said he, with a degree of frankness rivalling that of his interlocutor. "That what was told me exercised no very important influence over my opinions, may be inferred from my presence here."

"You are here simply because your position is desperate!"—coolly rejoined A. O. "You are here because there is no hope elsewhere. You may also perhaps, have heard from Captain Blencowe, and other victims who have escaped without serious injury from my clutches, that even the crocodile of the shores of Pactolus is sometimes moved to a caprice of pity; and are willing to try whether anything in your youth and inexperience may reach his milder mood."

"My youth and inexperience at least encourage you to trifle with me!"—cried Basil, with a rising color, more enraged by the ironical smile pervading the countenance of A. O., than by his mere words. And, having snatched his hat from the window-seat, he was preparing without ceremony to quit the room.

"In all money-dealings, Mr. Annesley," said his companion, undismayed by this tacit threat of breaking up the conference, "you will find the command of your own temper five per cent. in your favor. You cannot afford to quarrel with me. At this moment, I am the necessary evil which must redeem you from the still greater of immediate dishonor. Do me the favor, sir, to sign this paper," said he, placing in the hands of Basil, one which, during their conference, he had been quietly preparing. "It is, as even *your* slight knowledge of business must assure you, of no legal value. It is the obligation of a gentleman, and must derive its sole importance from a gentleman's signature. It will neither enable me to imprison my debtor nor molest him; but it will remind Sir Bernard Annesley's son, that, within three years after attaining his majority, he has engaged to pay me back a sum of four hundred pounds; whereof the interest, at five per cent. shall be quarterly forthcoming."

Basil took the promissory note into his hands, and seeing that it

was phrased strictly according to the announcement of A. O., conceived himself well off at having so small a bonus as £50 demanded of him as the penalty of the transaction. But what was his amazement when, on taking his place at the bureau, to sign the paper, he found lying before him, a printed check of one of the first banking houses of the West End, bearing the signature of Abednego Osalez, and directing the firm in question to "Pay to Mr. Annesley or bearer the sum of four hundred pounds!"

Scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes—his cheeks flushed by the excitement of the moment—his heart throbbing almost to agony with the consciousness of release from the first great embarrassment of his life, Basil, ere he accepted one document or executed the other, was eager to express his astonishment and gratitude to one whom he could scarcely regard in any other light than that of a benefactor; but on turning round for the purpose, he found that A. O., instead of remaining behind his chair to watch his proceedings, was engaged at the door in earnest colloquy with the unsightly crone, who officiated as his clerk of the presence.

"Tell him I am engaged—say it is impossible for me to see him this morning," said the Money-lender, in the imperative tone he had assumed in the earlier part of his colloquy with Basil.

"I have told him so already, sir," croaked the old woman, "but he will not be denied. He has got out of his cabriolet, and is standing on the door-steps awaiting."

"Let him wait!" said the Money-lender. "If he persist in coming in, show him into the front parlor, and open one of the shutters, till I am ready to receive him.—You perceive, Mr. Annesley, that I am waited for. Spare me therefore the effusions of thankfulness I see expanding upon your lips," resumed A. O., turning towards Basil, who stood transfixed beside the bureau, the check in one hand, and the promissory note in the other. "Have you signed it?"—continued he, pointing to the latter document. "Be quick, if indeed you have carefully perused the terms. Never, while you live, put your name to a paper, of which you have not, to a syllable, mastered the contents. Nay,—spare me your declarations of confidence: you may have less grounds for gratitude than you suppose. Remember the fable of the little fish thrown back into the river to become a bigger, by the wary angler. Be not too sure that the Money-lender is not facilitating your first ingress into his net, in order to secure your return."

Basil Annesley, who had now both read and signed the promissory note, and placed the printed check in his pocket-book, smiled at this sinister prognostication.

"I do not choose you to be ruined by anybody but myself," observed the Money-lender with a smile: "in proof of which, let me advise you to place that pocket-book in a securer place than your front pocket. Above all, deposit, this very morning, the money you are about to receive, with your own banker, so as to be ready for the exigencies, which—well, well! I will spare you my lecture!"—said he, interrupting himself when he saw the color rising into the cheeks of Basil. "You receive sterling advice, I perceive, less thankfully than sterling coin."

"The gentleman is in the parlor, sir," said the old woman, again thrusting in her dingy face and still dingier cap.

"So much the better," replied the Money-lender, with a bitter sneer. "It may serve to bring so fine a gentleman to his senses, to make acquaintance with the mice and spiders of my desolate habitation."

In another moment Basil Annesley, still misdoubting whether he were awake or asleep, had shaken hands with the new acquaintance who had acted by him the part of an old friend, and was once more in the street. A few paces before him was leisurely proceeding a plain but handsome cabriolet, of which the tiger who held the reins wore a plain undress livery. But the horse of which the little fellow was in charge was not to be mistaken. It was one renowned in the glories of Hyde Park, a celebrated cab, announcing that the fine gentleman just then cooling his heels in the dismantled dining-room of A. O. was no less a person than his grace the Duke of Rochester.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT day was a day of overflowing joy to Basil Annesley! Had the pavement, intervening between Soho Square, and St. James's Street, been tessellated with gems, after the fashion of the sanctuaries of the Alhambra or Aladdin's palace, instead of displaying the half frosty, half filthy flagstones of one of the least inviting quarters of the West End, he could not have felt more elated or have made his way more lightsomely of foot than on his road to Herries'; where, after receiving his four hundred pounds, he paid the first half year's interest thereon in advance to the account of Abednego Osalez, Esq., in order that, for twelve months to come, he might be conscience-clear on the subject.

Let him who, after laboring under the pressure of pecuniary embarrassment has ever found himself suddenly and unexpectedly released from thralldom, declare whether any earthly triumph can exceed that soul-stirring emancipation!

The king may make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that;

but, far surpassing any creation recorded in the peerage, is that of a free man, out of a wretch on whose shoulder the gripe of the bailiff has been felt by agonizing anticipation.

As regarded Annesley's feelings, he was now out of debt; for he was in debt only within limit of his means. Four and twenty hours before, he had looked forward to the dreadful 28th of December, which was to find him in possession of three hundred pounds, or steep him in shame to the very lips, as a criminal to the day of execution. He would not have felt half so overjoyed at being declared heir-apparent to the Duke of Rochester, as to know that four hundred pounds were that day placed to his credit at Coutts's.

How little—how very little—do those real potentates of modern times, who sway the destinies of nations and individuals with a rod of gold, and issue their decrees in bank notes and Exchequer bills, the bankers of money-spinning Europe, conjecture the fearful nature of the passions imprisoned in that Pandora's box, their iron safe; the world of magic spells, compassed within the simple parchment covers of the books of their constituents; the fiat of life and death occasionally inscribed on one of the printed checks which their clerk mechanically cashes, enregistering the number of the notes he gives in exchange with as cool deliberation as though the heart of the expectant "bearer" throbbed not with ecstasy at the sight of those bringers of glad tidings to his necessitous household!—The whole romance of civilization is in fact comprised within the magic initials of L. S. D. MONEY is indeed POWER—the "Open sesame" to the seemingly impervious rock of human destiny!—Of all the masquerading guises in which false Philosophy loves to parade herself, contempt of MONEY, the ladder by which almost every earthly advantage is attainable, is surely the most absurd!

Poor Basil among the rest, had often blazoned forth his contempt of riches; laboring to reconcile his mother to her straitened means by assurances of his indifference to the dross of this world; nay, had even deceived *himself* by frequent protestations of indifference to the gorgeous gew-gaws of opulence. He fancied himself content, nay proud and happy to be poor. And now, the possession of a paltry four hundred pounds, was driving him half out of his wits for joy! For though the origin of his embarrassments was of a nature far from dishonoring to his head or heart, it was one he dared not have disclosed to his austere mother. Almost, indeed, would he have preferred to pass in her eyes for the dupe of the gaming-table, or for a frivolous spendthrift, ruined by idle extravagance, than to expose the truth.

Not one guinea of the money had been applied to his own use. The necessities of another had caused him to pledge his honorable name beyond his power of redemption. And yet, he had not even enjoyed the happiness of claiming sympathy from that other in his embarrassment. He had been forced to pretend opulence at the moment of signing the bills of exchange, and indifference on the subject ever since, lest the obligation should afflict the delicate and high-minded individual whom his interference had been the means of rescuing from the utmost extremity of distress.

There was only one drawback on his exulting happiness: his mother's illness! She had written to him to defer his customary Christmas visit—saying that she herself was ill, and that Nicholas, the old gardener, was on his death-bed. Even this intelligence, however, was less acutely felt than when sinking under the apprehension that his difficulties might shortly aggravate the evil; and now, disregarding her prohibition, and forestalling his purposed Christmas visit, he readily obtained a few days' leave of absence; and, armed with a thousand little tokens of kindness for the invalids, hurried to Barlingham. Instead of affording Lady Annesley time to renew her prohibition, he chose to take her by surprise.

Few are the contingencies in this world which justify taking people by surprise. Husbands and wives have often had to rue the officious affection which impelled them prematurely into each other's presence; and the best household, the best school, the most united family, the most attached circle of friends, cannot be too accurately apprised of the exact moment at which the absent one is likely to rush once more into their arms.

Poor Basil reached the Grange, his whole heart overflowing not simply with the milk of human kindness but with its cream. Late in the evening, he reached Lyndhurst by the coach; and preferring to restore circulation to his chilly limbs by a walk of a mile and a half across the fields, to a three miles jumble in a postchaise, through one of the most unsatisfactory lanes that ever besloughed the wagon of the despairing farmer, he accepted the offer of a countryman to accompany him with his valise, and cheerfully cut across to Barlingham, by a way familiar to him from boyhood.

To beguile the dreariness of his lonely walk, he almost unconsciously burst forth into a song, the produce of one of the olden poets.

Truce to thy fond misgivings,
These fruitless tears give o'er,—
No absence can divide us, love,
No parting part us more!
Mountains and seas may rise between,
To mock our baffled will;
But heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We bide together still.

Where'er I go, or far or near,
I cannot be alone;
Thy voice is ever in mine ear,
Thy hand press'd in mine own;
Thy head upon my pillow rests,
Thy words my bosom thrill,
And heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We bide together still.

And when stern death shall work his worst,
And all our joys are done,
E'en by the mystery that unites
The dial and the sun;
Though one exist in heavenly bliss,
One in this world of ill,
Yet heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We'll bide together still.

But as his voice died away, the loneliness seemed drearier than before. The weather was frosty. Not a breath was stirring: the moon had risen; and under its influence and that of the bitterness of the weather, the landscape exhibited a ghastly and death-like appearance. The fields were free from all transit of living thing: not so much as a plough left upturned in the furrows, for the readier recommencement of the morrow's labors, as at more propitious seasons of the year. Not so much as a stoat, or urchin, stealing in quest of midnight prey from hedge to hedge. And when at last Basil came in view of the Grange, standing black and desolate in the moonlight, in the centre of its open square of dark and leafless trees, it was like approaching the uninhabited castle of some fairy tale: not a dog to give tongue at sound of their intruding steps, as they crossed the little bridge leading from the moat to the chief entrance. And, lest Lady Annesley should be alarmed by the unwonted sound of the door-bell at so late an hour, her son made his way round to the postern leading to the offices, and entered the kitchen with a degree of humility most vexatious to his temporary esquire of the body, who had anticipated that, in escorting to the Grange the heir-apparent of the family, he should force a triumphal entry, drums beating and colors flying. Basil's hurried injunction to the two astonished women-servants, who screamed aloud on beholding him, to take care of his vase and its bearer, while he made his way into the house, scarcely reconciled poor Hodge to the indignity of stealing into the house, like a thief in the dark.

Leaving the Hampshire bumpkin to the consolations of a blazing fire and substantial supper, young Annesley seized the candle presented by the blushing, curtsying, handmaiden of old Dorcas; from whom he had already extracted that his mother and her waiting-woman were in attendance upon old Nicholas, who had been removed to a bed-room on the first floor, having, it was feared, not many days to live.

"My lady has ordered tea in half an hour in her sitting-room," added the damsel. "Shall I acquaint her, sir, that you are here?—would you rather I should go and make a fire, Mr. Basil, in your own room?"

Young Annesley accepted the latter alternative. Unwilling to startle the dying man by too sudden an appearance in his chamber, he determined to await the coming of his mother in her own apartment.

The sitting-room usually occupied by Lady Annesley during the winter months, was a small chamber on the first floor, adjoining her bed-room. The ceiling, as in all the rooms in the Grange, was not only low, but traversed and deformed by heavy beams; and the floor, of stucco or composition. Such a chamber, however, its embayed windows being thickly curtained, and its floor concealed by a carpet, more easily rendered warm and comfortable for the long cheerless winter evenings, than one of nobler proportions; and the rich saloons of many a lordly castle might have found scope for envy during that bitter weather, in the little snuggerly to which, when Basil made his way into the sanctuary, a blazing wood fire was affording the cheerful glow so welcome to the eye of the benighted traveller.

This room was, of all the house, the one least familiar to Basil. It was four years since he had spent a winter at the Grange. His return from Germany had chanced in the summer season; and the preceding Christmas, having recently joined his regiment, he had been forced to pass in town. During his holidays, Lady Annesley usually inhabited her drawing-room on the ground floor, as containing her musical instruments, and the book-cases calculated to afford amusement or instruction to her son; and it was only on occasion of some brief interview between them, that she received him in what she called her dressing-room, though the ceremonies of her simple toilet were performed in the sleeping-room adjoining. It possessed, accordingly, all the charm of prohibition in the eyes of young Annesley. It was the blue chamber of the Grange—the only one into which he was not permitted to penetrate uninvited.

On the present occasion, he felt privileged. His visit was as the return of the prodigal son; and he chose to anticipate the favors reserved for such an incident. Moreover, Hannah had informed him that the only fire then burning, was in my lady's room; and the temperature of that December night was so little to be trifled with, that he entertained no scruple about invading the forbidden precincts.

"I don't wonder my mother is so fond of it!" was Basil's ejaculation, as, stationed upon the Persian rug before the fire, he cast his eyes round the cheerful chamber, in which Lady Annesley had judiciously assembled such remnants of antique furniture as she had found at the Grange;—the old carved chairs and tables, and a twisted-legged cabinet or two, imparting the Elizabethan character he had recently observed as the height of the fashion. From the carved ebony desk on which Lady Annesley's handkerchief was still lying, to the *priedieu* in a recess near the fire-place, which was fitted up as an oratory, everything was so strictly in keeping as the bower-chamber of a lady-fair of the sixteenth century, that it might have served as a study for Cattermole, or as the boudoir of sweet Anne Page.

"And yet what utter solitude—what isolation from her caste and kind!" was his second reflection, on recalling to mind that this snuggerly, so charming as a retreat from the severity of a winter's night, was Lady Annesley's abode from year's-end to year's-end, season after season! "A woman must have either a very good, or a very bad conscience, to find her happiness in such complete alienation from society."

That the former alternative was the origin of his beloved mother's retreat, was so naturally his conviction, as to excuse the second conjecture, though breathed only to himself; and regarding that elegantly antiquated room rather as the oriel of a Lady Abbess than as the boudoir of a woman of the world, Basil did new homage to the excellent taste which had converted the desolate walls of an old farm-house into a retreat so enviable.

It was not with him *there*, however, as in the den of the Money-changer. He felt it no treachery to examine, more leisurely than his mother's presence on the spot had ever yet enabled him, the objects around him. They were part and parcel of his mother, even as he, her only son, was a portion of herself; and the time must come, though he had never hazarded the anticipation, when they would become his own.

In the tediousness therefore, of waiting for Lady Annesley's appearance, he cast his eyes from the heavy Persian carpets muffling the floor, to the bronze lamp, brightening every nook of the antiquated chamber. On the chimney ledge of carved Portland stone, against which he was leaning, stood two old agate chalices of great beauty; and between them, on a slab of green jasper, an antique bronze of considerable value, though exhibiting only an unsightly reptile, formed of that matchless metal of Corinth, of which all modern imitations fail to acquire the glowing tinge arising from the admixture of the more precious metals in the outpourings of the rich old city from whose burning ruins fused forth the metal unwittingly created by the spoliating hands of man.

On the wall opposite the fire place, hung a fine portrait, well known to artists as one of the *chef d'œuvre* of Sir Joshua: a likeness of Lord L. the father of Lady Annesley, wearing the numerous foreign orders commemorative of the distinctions of his diplomatic career. A marble statuette of a child; an isolated pedestal of giallo antico filled one corner of the room, the others being completed with hanging shelves of carved ebony, filled with books; a female child, of exquisite grace and beauty, evidently the work of a first-rate hand, which Basil fancied he had heard whispered by Dorcas in his boyhood as an early portrait of his sister, Mrs. Vernon.

All these objects he had noticed before. But upon Lady Annesley's desk lay a square book covered with dark velvet, and having golden clasps of great beauty and value, like the mass books of wealthy Catholics, inducing the renewal of a suspicion that he had sometimes entertained, that his mother was secretly attached to a faith which was that neither of her husband nor her ancestors. Curious to determine whether it were indeed, a *livre d'heures*, he opened the clasps, when to his utter surprise, he found that the seeming book was a picture case, containing on one side the enamelled portrait of a man,—on the other, also under a glass, a lock of glossy hair of raven blackness.

Basil stood utterly confounded. His late father, as he knew from portraits and from tradition, was fair as a German. His grandfather, Lord L., seemed to be now looking him in the face, in attestation that he had no affinity with the individual depicted in that mysterious miniature. Lady Annesley was one of three daughters—his coheir-ess: nor, as well as Basil could recal to mind, had she a single male relation near enough to account for his picture being in her possession. What was the meaning of all this? He fixed his eye searchingly upon the portrait, as if to interrogate its right and title to be found in his mother's safe keeping.

The face was one of more interest than regular beauty; dark, high browed, having a profusion of black hair, and eyes that derived a deeper shade from the reflection. The mouth was of rare beauty, yet unpleasing expression: being tempered by an effusion of scorn little in accordance with the mournful character of the eyes; and, on the whole, it was one of those countenances which fascinate the attention even while impressing the beholder with an unfavorable opinion of the original. The age of the person represented could not exceed five and-twenty, and the dress was that worn by English gentlemen at the commencement of the reign of George III.

The more the attention of Basil became riveted upon the picture, the stronger was the impression that some mysterious interest must be connected with an object which he had attained the age of twenty years without perceiving in his mother's possession. In his boyish days in those holidays of affection when the secret treasures of a mother are brought to amuse a sick child or console an afflicted one, he had often been allowed to admire the contents of his mother's cabinets; curious shells,—rare minerals, antique rings, the old fashioned repeater, with its massive chain and enamelled gew gaws; nay there was a valuable miniature of Lady Annesley's mother, the Lady L., in her black lace hood and point stomacher, set in diamonds and enamel, with an L. and coronet, flourished in seed pearls upon the braid of hair forming the reverse, which had actually been allowed him as a plaything in the convalescence succeeding a dangerous illness;—Yet of the miniature in the velvet cover he had never been suffered to obtain a glimpse!

He had just replaced it on the desk and himself upon the hearth rug, when the door was deliberately opened, and Lady Annesley made her appearance.

Prepared to find her as gratified by his visit as he was pleased with his own alacrity in paying it, Basil was moved almost to awe, by the rigid coldness of her mode of receiving him. After rebuking his disobedience in being there she coolly informed him that with dangerous illness in her household, his presence would be an inconvenience.

"In that case I will be off to-morrow," replied Basil, trying to recover or conceal his chagrin. "But, at least, dearest mother, forgive me so far as to bear with me this one night. I could not endure the anxiety of supposing you ill, without bringing my own eyes to verify the state of your health."

"Another time honor me with your confidence so far as to believe that I tell you the exact truth," said Lady Annesley, sternly. "I have been ill. I am well again,—unless, indeed, the vexation of being thus broken in upon, should produce a recurrence of my indisposition."

While expressing his hopes that he might not have so great an evil on his conscience, Basil saw the eyes of his mother wander from his face to the desk, and from the desk back again to his varying countenance; as if trying to decipher whether he had found time to examine the scattered contents of the chamber, or open the portrait. The confusion painted on Basil's face, was, however, just as likely to arise from her ungracious mode of reception, as from consciousness of having indulged a prying curiosity; and she remained lost in perplexity.

The entrance of Hannah with the rich old fashioned tea-service, which having placed upon the table, she was hurrying away again, now encouraged young Annesley to ask permission to visit the bedside of the poor invalid, before the night became too far advanced to admit of disturbing him.

"Dorcas is with him night and day. He has all the attendance his state requires," was Lady Annesley's frigid reply.

"But as a satisfaction to myself, and, if I may be permitted to say so, to him. Poor Nicholas was always so fond of me!"—pleaded Basil.

"He is past deriving pleasure from the presence even of those who are dearest to him," persisted Lady Annesley. "Let me beg you rather to ascertain that your things have been safely deposited in your room, by the person who accompanied you,—yonder poor girl, being scarcely strong enough to supply the place of him we are about to lose."

Basil accepted the hint. Nothing more likely to injure the candor of an ingenuous heart, than the undue possession of a secret. For the first time in his life, he attributed a stratagem to his mother; convinced she was desirous to get rid of him, only that she might replace the mysterious portrait upon her desk in its accustomed concealment.

He was so far justified in his suspicions, that on his return to the tea-table, refreshed after his day's journey by purification from London soot and the dust of the road, a single glance towards the ebony desk convinced him that the picture had disappeared. He fancied, however, that his mother had detected even that momentary scrutiny; for her deportment was, if possible, more ungracious than before.

At any other moment, he would have attempted to dissipate her ill humour by allusions to the news of the day, and to the tittle-tattle of London life. But though excluded from the chamber of death, he could not forget that, at the distance of a few chambers from the one they occupied, lay an aged man, endeared to both by long association, and about to appear in the presence of his Maker. This indeed was a sufficient excuse for the singular mood of Lady Annesley. In many persons, grief takes the form of anger. A proud spirit, unwilling to display itself covered with dust and ashes, uplifts its head with unbecoming pride, in order to conceal that temporary humiliation.

As every stroke tells against a gamester in his vein of illfortune, whatever topic was selected by Basil to dispel the embarrassment of that painful *tete-a-tete*, seemed to aggravate her still further against him.

Lady Annesley, as if desirous of promoting desultory conversation, adverted to the young nephew of the Duke of Rochester, who had recently entered his regiment.

"I was formerly acquainted with his father, and uncle," said she carelessly.

"His father is dead," observed Basil; "and his uncle were perhaps better in his grave. He is in the jaws of perdition,—ruined soul, body, and estate; a victim to play, with his fine fortune melting away in the grasp of the Jews!"

At that moment, an impulse of compunction, peculiar to generous hearts, brought before him the beneficent conduct to A. O., and the consciousness of his own obligations; and without reflecting on the singular effects such an outburst must produce on Lady Annesley, who had not the slightest clue to the origin of his opinions, he suddenly veered round, and began expressing his contempt of the existing prejudices against that contemned class of the community; citing every advantageous opinion or example ever adduced in favor of the people after God's own heart, from Cumberland and Miss Edgeworth, back to the choicest authorities of the Judaic world.

A sudden flush overspread the habitually pallid face of Lady Annesley. Her spirit seemed chafing within her. At the last she spake with her tongue.

"I can readily understand," said she, with undisguised bitterness, "that the follies and vices of London, and the companionship into which they may have forced you, may have done something towards relaxing the principles in which you have been reared, and the proud instincts of honorable descent. But I had *not* expected you would so soon have stooped to *this*. I had not supposed that a few thousands conceded by these wretched unbelievers, these heirs of perdition, gilded over like the molten calf till even Christian kings fall down and worship,—would so soon have obliterated in your honest heart the prejudice common to all ages—all nations—and consequently respectable even as a prejudice. For my part I loathe a Jew;—I am proud to declare that I *loathe* a Jew! Apart from the crime which stamped them with eternal condemnation, I detest their principles, I detest their practices. Wherever there are Jews, there is narrowness of mind—foulness of body—baseness of heart. They are a filthy people. Even as of old they bought with thirty pieces of silver the blood of their Redeemer, would they still chaffer for the heart's blood of the innocent! I tell you Basil, I loathe them! and those who induced you to entertain a contrary opinion, deceived you as much as they injured me!"

The eyes of young Annesley were now fixed upon his mother with unqualified amazement. She, usually so mild, so serene, so low-voiced, so indifferent to the things of this world, to be excited by so slight a cause into this violent diatribe!—And in the house of death!—With her aged servitor expiring almost within hearing of her uncalled for vociferation!

Basil was awestruck! He could not help surmising for a moment that his beloved mother's reason might be effected by her attendance on the deathbed of her faithful old domestic, while weakened by the effects of recent indisposition.

"Believe me, dearest mother," said he, "I never heard you accused of any partiality for these maligned people. My inclination in their favor is a weakness arising from peculiar circumstances of a nature wholly personal."

"You have heard it!" cried Lady Annesley, unsubdued by his deprecation. "Do not add deceit to the audacity of attempting to invade the sacredness of my thoughts and feelings. You have heard it!"

Again, terrified and grieved, young Annesley was about to enter upon his own disputation. But as he advanced nearer towards his mother, he perceived that, overcome by the violence of her emotions, she had thrown herself back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands to conceal a frantic burst of tears.

Basil Annesley stood transfixed. It was the first time in his life he had ever seen his mother shed a tear.

CHAPTER V.

"Oh! mother—yet no mother."—*Savage.*

"I HAD NO intention of offending you, dearest mother," whispered Basil, when at length the subsiding of Lady Annesley's emotion seemed to justify his addressing her. But, to his great surprise, on the withdrawal of her hands from her face to enable her to reply, her countenance had so completely resumed its usual rigidity, that all apology appeared superfluous. He now attempted to take into his own one of the hands which had been screening those features; but it was obstinately fixed to her side.

"Believe me, I had no intention of offending you," reiterated the young man, with still more earnest affection.

"Your excuses are a deeper offence than your indiscretion, replied Lady Annesley, in a harsh voice. "Your coming hither at all, has disturbed and thwarted me. Your conduct, now you are here, seems scarcely likely to reconcile me to your disobedience."

"Dearest mother!" cried Basil, stung by her severity out of his habitual deference of reserve, "you well know that your wishes

are laws to me,—that I would sacrifice my happiness here and hereafter for your sake."

"You are a large talker, Basil," interrupted, Lady Annesley. "It is easy to protest—easy to undertake services or sacrifices that can never be required of you. I requested you to abstain for the present, from visiting the Grange. Yet, you are here!"

"I have already explained my motives," cried Basil, eagerly—"already pledged myself to immediate departure. If you wish it, mother, I will not wait till to-morrow—I will be off this very night, I can return to Lyndhurst—I can sleep at the inn. It is late. The fellow who brought my baggage will scarcely be persuaded to return to-night. But early in the morning he shall be here in time to enable me to start by the first coach."

Lady Annesley gazed a moment upon the young and handsome face, on which the most earnest sincerity was painted at that moment.

"Abide here to-night, my son," said she, calmly, at the close of her scrutiny. "Another time, be more acquiescent."

"But I assure you dearest mother, I should be well accommodated at Lyndhurst: and it may be as well to be there in waiting for the coach. I—"

"You will remain here, if you please!" interrupted Lady Annesley, in a cold and positive tone. "It is, as you observe, late; and the hour is unseemly for traversing the fields. The forest produces inconvenient neighbors, and dangerous company. The illness of my poor Nicholas proceeded, in the first instance, from a rough encounter on the road, one evening at dusk, on his return from conveying my letters to the post. I pray you, therefore, to remain here—"

"Certainly, if such be your desire."

"But not the less to hasten your departure at an early hour to-morrow. I will even take my leave of you to-night, Basil; for I must watch through the small hours, to enable poor Dorcas to take some sleep; and shall probably retire to rest just as you are stirring."

"As you please dear mother," replied the dispirited young man, perceiving by her tone and gesture that these words implied dismissal for the night. "If you must indeed watch by the poor old man, I can understand that my presence here must be importunate.—But if you would only permit me for this one night to take your place—"

"I have already expressed my pleasure on that point."

"At least, since you judge me too restless or careless for a nurse, (though you used to praise my care when I waited upon yourself during your attack of ague last year,) at least, there is Hannah to relieve you. Hannah is a stout, active, trusty girl, who would be none the worse for wanting, occasionally, a night's rest."

"She is not to be trusted. The young are ever inefficient watchers. With them 'the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.'—They have no distracting thoughts to keep their senses on the alert,—no cares to render them wakeful. They lay their heads on their pillows, and are in Heaven till morning; and when they attempt the watcher's chair of penance, fancy their heads upon their pillows!"

"If it be on that account you refuse my services," observed Basil, "I promise you, mother, that I have cares enough in my keeping both of my own and of other people, to keep me as wakeful as you could desire."

Again did Lady Annesley intently examine her son.

"You have no right to have cares of your own," said she; "and I advise you to be cautious how you become care-keeper for others. Your own turn will come. You have your share, Basil, in the typical inheritance of the sons of Adam,—the thorns which the earth was condemned to bring forth in punishment for the sin of our common parents. Such is the commandment of a jealous God!"

"I am more in fear of the penalty entailed upon my head by the fall of man," observed Basil, in a low voice, "than of having to answer for any sins of my own parents. But, as I said before, mother, if it be because you think me a sleepy-head that you deny me the pleasure of relieving your guard this one night—"

"Once and for all, it is not on that account," said Lady Annesley, in an angry voice; "you were not wont, Basil, to be so pertinacious or so inquisitive. Amend the fault before we meet again; and show me that it is already repented by immediate compliance with my requests. Retire to rest, that you may be stirring the earlier.—Yonder is your bed-candle.—Good night."

Basil Annesley was conscious at that moment of a choking sensation in his throat, such as he had often experienced in childhood, when unjustly chidden; and which now almost suggested resistance to authority thus harshly exercised. He remained a moment doubtful whether to fling himself at Lady Annesley's feet, and implore a more motherly entreatment; or stand forth reprovingly in all the energy of his youthful sense of her injustice, and hazard a still stronger appeal. But that momentary pause recalled to his generous mind that his mother was harassed by fatigue, and care worn by the danger of her faithful servant; and he determined, as his filial piety had so often determined before, to submit and be patient.

After imprinting a kiss upon the slender hand which, if no longer

obstinately withheld from him was far from encouragingly held forth, he took the candle from the marble table, hastily lighted it, and silently withdrew; eager to give vent, in his own chamber, to the emotions contending in his heart.

But on his arrival there, he was struck by the order in which his things were laid out for him; and the more than usual care with which his comfort had been provided for.—Hoping to obtain an interview with old Dorcas, and entreat her influence with her lady, to obtain him his due share in the family vigils, he strove to discover some deficiency entitling him to ring for assistance.—Impossible!—Everything was in its place—everything forthcoming; the kettle beside the fire,—the boot-jack and slippers beside the chair.

"I can, at all events, summon Hannah, on pretence of wishing to be called before daybreak," said he, musing.

Having fulfilled his intention, he anxiously awaited the tap at the door, announcing the usually assiduous attendance of the active damsel. But no knock was heard,—no Hannah made her appearance; and when, weary of waiting and having twice poked up the fire into a blaze to beguile his impatience, he ventured to ring again, the same silence prevailed. Nothing was audible but the shrill whistling of the wind in the old corridor; and now and then, a squeak and a scuffle among the merry mice, coursing each other in brigades, by moonlight, in the deserted chambers above.

A third time did Basil make the attempt, which, he trusted, would summon poor Dorcas for a moment from the chamber of the invalid which lay at the extremity of an adjoining passage. But, lo! when, instead of the expected tap, the door revolved slowly upon its hinges, it was his mother, and not her attendant, who stood before him!

"Are you in want of anything, that you thus disturb the house?"—said she, gravely. "I thought I had been careful in supplying all you could possibly need to-night."

"I merely rang for Hannah, to say that—"

"Hannah has retired to bed, and Dorcas is retiring," persisted Lady Annesley. "When you released me just now, I took up my post for the night beside the sick man; satisfied that, having carefully arranged your room with my own hands previous to joining you at tea, no further attendance would be wanting.—Is there anything I can procure or do for you?"

"Could I have entertained the least idea, dearest mother, that you had already given yourself all this trouble on my account—"

"I ask you again, is there anything further I can do for you?—Be quick!—My presence is required elsewhere."

"Nothing on earth."

"You rang, then, to summon the girl for a needless attendance?"

"I rang to request I might be called at the earliest hour of morning, to secure my obedience to your orders," replied Basil, proudly.

"Did you suppose that I should leave the hour of your rising to chance? Be satisfied!—You shall be called betimes. And now, let me entreat you to abstain from further disturbance. You are in the house of sickness—perhaps to become, before the morning, the house of death!"

Basil stood confounded at the unmerited harshness of his mother; and he did not recover his self-possession for many minutes after Lady Annesley quitted the room. His heart was now sorer than before. He was more than ever stung by her severity, on finding it coupled with the vigilance of mother-love which had presided over the arrangements of his chamber. He felt that he must, indeed, be a grievous offender, since the affections of her heart were thus controllable by the sternness of her displeasure.

He now flung himself despondingly, into a seat before the fire; and placing his feet upon the old-fashioned fender, and fixing his eyes upon the heavy brass dogs supporting the crackling logs—upon the hearth, tried to feel himself at home. It is strange how often the habitation familiar to us from infancy, seems less familiar and less a home to us, than the dwelling of the stranger. For the life and soul of him, Basil could not feel at home. He kept dreading the re-entrance of his mother for further reprehension, yet equally feared to bolt the door against her return, lest she should take offence at this seeming defiance. His very thoughts, under the influence of such impressions, did not seem secure from her intrusion. There were subjects on which he felt afraid to ponder. There were people he dared not pass in review, or recall with the tenderness of memory, lest he should find the severe eye of Lady Annesley fixed upon his face, prepared to scan and scrutinize the nature of his feelings.

Most people are conscious of the sort of disburthenment of thought and sentiment apt to follow a transition from cities to the country. In the quiet of the first night spent out of town, disjointed images reconnect themselves; ideas and conclusions assume a regular train of thought; and Basil experienced all the desire of one suddenly enfranchised from the rabble and tumult of London, to dwell upon the course of recent events, and determine more considerably what portion of his loves and friendships had been lavished in vain.

But it was no moment for such reveries. The dread of his mother's reappearance was potent over his mind, as over that of a child the terror of a midnight apparition.—His thoughts were paralyzed.—He could not even feel freely at that moment.—

Wondering surmises hastily traversed his brain with regard to the

mysterious portrait he had seen that evening, and the still more mysterious emotions betrayed by his mother. Painfully-pleasing visions flitted before his eyes of the bright form of Esther—his own Esther,—his beloved Esther! But just as her eyes seemed gazing into his, the creaking of the wainscot seemed to indicate from without the approach of Lady Annesley; and the light of the fire appeared a reflection of that which had recently brightened the chamber, from the taper held in the hand of his mother.

The night was beginning to be tempestuous. As the moon had set, the winds were rising;—beating menacingly against the crazy walls of the old Grange, as if to demand how they had dared so long to withstand the attacks of time and tide; and roaring in the vast chimney, as though to inquire the meaning of an unwonted inmate in that room.

By degrees, the storm rose into fierceness. The shrill whistling of the winds became a shriek; and the arrowy pattering of sleet was heard sharply against the windows.

Under this influence, the spirits of Basil became still more and more depressed. He was incapable of even the sensations of comfort imparted by a warm fireside, when listening to a storm without. He was an intruder in his mother's house,—he was an alien from his mother's heart. Lady Annesley had secrets in which she rejected his participation,—she had cares for which she disdained his solace.—At that moment, Basil felt himself to be most unhappy.

To sit and gaze upon the glowing embers, however, afforded little consolation. It is when perplexed, not when afflicted, that we delight in fire-gazing. At length, the warmth which imparted no pleasure, seemed to inspire energy; for, suddenly starting up, he recalled to mind that the surest way to win his mother's confidence, was implicit obedience; and that, in order "early to rise," it was expedient to adopt the precept of "early to bed."

Midnight had already struck, previous to this good resolution; and ere his head had been long upon the pillow, the first hour of morning was sternly announced by the crazy old clock gracing the stair-head adjoining his chamber. It was unlikely, however, that he should hear the striking of a second, for he was growing drowsy. His cares assumed a less definite pressure; and the shape of Esther hovered less visibly before his closing eyes. Easier in spirit—easy in position, he forgot the causes of maternal oppression and his own subservience to a Jew, and fell quietly asleep.

His dreams, however, soon became unquiet. The expressive countenance portrayed by the miniature, (its handsome feature commingled with those of Abednego Osalez and of his own face,) seemed to mock and perplex his slumbers. Again did his stern mother harshly reproach him; and strange voices seemed to mingle in mockery with her upbraidings.

He woke: he started from his feverish pillow! The strange voices were easily explained by the fitful moaning of the storm, which now appeared to sink into the sobbing of despair,—now to rise into shrieks of eldritch laughter. But there were no faces around him to explain the visions of his disquiet. He was alone, with scarcely a gleam of light emanating from the dying embers on the hearth.

In another moment, he would have sunk down again upon his pillow, and fallen once more asleep, but that his disturbed imagination conceived an idea, that the wailing which at first appeared that of the storm without, might after all be the expression of human suffering,—the plaintive cries of the dying man. His mother might be exposed to the dreadful task of watching alone over an agonized bed of death!—

He rose, and flung on his dressing-gown. Displeased as Lady Annesley might be at his presuming to disobey her commands, he would not suffer this. He *could* not forbear!—He would insist upon sharing her vigils. Softly opening the door, he proceeded without a light along the corridor, hoping to attain the door of the apartment, which he knew to have been appropriated to the poor old man. But, as he advanced, he became again persuaded that those mournful moanings really proceeded from the gusts of the storm. Nay, as he approached nearer the chamber of sickness, these happened to have fallen into such momentary stillness, that the beating of his own heart seemed almost as audible, as he recognised, in the dead of the night, the stern voice of Lady Annesley reciting aloud, the prayers for the sick and grievously afflicted, beside the bed of the dying man.

Retreating in haste to his chamber, as if unworthy to share a task so solemn, Basil was soon in bed; and the momentary chill and movement of his exploit seemed to have restored the power of slumber; for he now slept heavily, and slept long.—How long he knew not: but a pale grey light was stealing into his chamber, when again he opened his eyes.

And *this* time, he could not deceive himself. A face *was* bending over him, and peering into *his*. Not the ideal face of Esther however. There was no mistaking it for any one of the visages which had haunted his dreams: or even for the rosy face of the damsel who, Lady Annesley had informed him, was charged to rouse him at daybreak. It was an aged face, withered by time and sorrow—even that of his mother's ancient gentlewoman.

"Master Basil, I say,—dear Master Basil," gasped the intruder, "I have been calling you these five minutes."—

"Thanks, Dorcas, many thanks.—I fear I have been sleeping heavily.—Send me my shaving-water, and I will be up directly. Is it late,—or am I yet in time?"

"Hush, sir; speak softly, I beg of you. My lady has not been an hour in bed; and having forced her to take an anodyne draught after the dreadful night she has been passing, so as to ensure her a few hours' rest to meet her further trials, I am grievously afraid of having her waked.—Nothing more injurious, Master Basil, than being disturbed when opiates are taking effect; and my poor lady is in no state to bear further extremities. She has not slept till now, these five nights past; nor enjoyed undisturbed slumber from the beginning of the poor old gardener's illness."

"I will be very careful, Dorcas. It had been already settled between us, that she was not to be disturbed for my departure. I will dress immediately, and shall have left the house without her knowing it."

"It is not *that*, sir.—I do not *wish* you to go, Master Basil.—I want your help, sir; I am in great trouble,—sore trouble and distress!"—faltering the old waiting-woman, drawing her hand across her eyes. "I am inclined to thank God for your being here, sir:—and yet I fear my lady will never forgive me for having even mentioned the subject to you.—But indeed, and indeed, sir, such scenes are too much for her! It would go against my conscience,—nay, I believe it as much as her life is worth—to wake her at this moment. Yet, indeed, sir, I cannot manage him alone."

"Are you in need, then, of my assistance for Nicholas, Dorcas?" cried young Annesley. "I will be with you in a moment, —"

"But you are not aware, sir; I must first apprise you,—your kind, good heart, Master Basil, would be too much shocked;—"

"My dear Dorcas, it is not the first time I have seen a dying man. Even my professional duties sometimes lead me to an hospital."

"Ay, ay, sir! But not to a death-bed like this. It is a hard thing even for *me*, who have passed through enough and to spare of the sorry sights of this world, to see my poor old fellow-servant in such a condition.—But for *your* young eyes, Master Basil, —"

"Only give me a moment to throw on my clothes, —"

"I am not without hope, sir, that, startled by your coming, whom he has not seen for months, Nicholas may so far recover his reason as to know you; and then, perhaps, he might compose himself, and be quieted without recourse to violent means,"—

"To *violent* means?"—interrupted Basil. "Is the poor fellow, then, bereft of his reason?"

"He has had repeated attacks of delirium throughout his illness. Yesterday morning, the professional gentleman who comes from Southampton to visit him, found it necessary to place him under restraint. Towards evening he became calmer; and my lady insisted upon releasing him from the strait-waistcoat. Infirm as he is,—feeble,—dying,—she says his violence is merely that of words, and that he can do no serious injury to himself or others."

"Gracious heaven!—My mother has been exposed, then, alone, throughout the night, to the violence of a lunatic!"

"Nicholas was never known, even in his worst paroxysms, Master Basil, to lift his hand, or even his voice, against my lady. Her presence seems to have a soothing power over him, beyond the authority or coercion of the physicians."

"But why, Dorcas, did you not tell me all this last night?"

"I was sent to bed by my lady, sir, tired and exhausted with struggling against him, without so much as an intimation of your arrival; and I am convinced, that, after so anxiously keeping you away from the Grange lest you should witness this mournful scene, my lady was in hopes you would be off to London without obtaining any suspicion of the matter."

"How strange!"—faltering young Annesley,

"My lady loves you too well, Master Basil, to bear your being unnecessarily troubled."

"But herself, Dorcas?"

"My lady is *used* to trouble—"

"My dear, dear mother!"—

"Show your affection, sir, by lending me your assistance and securing her a few hours' sleep; she will wake refreshed and comforted. But unless I can prevail upon you to remain, I have not courage to undertake him alone, till the Doctor comes."

Having persuaded the ancient gentlewoman to facilitate her own object by leaving him to dress and rejoin her, Basil hastily and anxiously accomplished his toilet. He was soon at the door from which he had so timidly retreated in the dead of night.

On entering the chamber, he perceived Dorcas stationed on one side of the bed; and, hidden within the curtains on the other, weeping and trembling, the stout servant girl, who had been left in charge of the maniac during her companion's absence. The grey light of dawn dimly penetrated the scene; falling chiefly on the white head of the venerable sufferer, who was propped with pillows, and staring around him with the ghastly fixedness characteristic of aberration of intellect.

"Do not be afraid of approaching him, sir: he is quite harmless!"—said Dorcas, with the bluntness of a coarse mind, on seeing her young master hesitate beside the door, impressed by the patriarchal

aspect of the old man, whose hoary beard had been many weeks unshorn.—“Besides, as I said just now, the surprise might do him good.”

“My poor Nicholas!” faltered young Annesley, who had by this time reached the bed.

“Who called me?” demanded the patient, in a hollow voice.

“I am sorry to hear you have been so ill, Nicholas,” persisted Basil, avoiding a direct reply, with a view to determine his power of recognition.

Instead of answering, the old man fixed his glassy eyes upon the person who had thus unexpectedly presented himself; and for some moments did not vary the dull steadfastness of his gaze. At length, a gradual ray of intelligence seemed to brighten that soulless stare.

“I know you *now*!”—said he, in a low voice. “I know you, and I tell you to begone!—What are you doing here?—Must there be more blood upon your hand?—Has not my lord expressly bidden us spurn you from his gate?—But there needed no bidding of *his*: I would have done it untold! Even *I* would not witness the shame of my young lady!”

“My poor Nicholas, compose yourself!” said Basil, in a soothing voice, bending kindly towards him.

“Your *poor* Nicholas?”—shouted the maniac, at the top of his broken voice, causing young Annesley to start back.—“How *dare* you call me your poor Nicholas?—How *dare* you attempt to cajole me?—Away with you—Away, Jew!—*I know* you, I tell you. When first your gold persuaded me unsuspectingly to do your bidding, I thought you a gentleman,—I thought you a *man*!—And now I spit upon you as a false and unbelieving Jew! Away, away, I say; or there is strength enough still in the old man’s gripe to tear you limb from limb!”

“For God’s sake, Mr. Annesley, sir, get away from him!” screamed the girl, who, in the danger of another, lost sight of her own.—“He will be the death of you, sir!”—

“He shall not go!—I have him fast?” cried the maniac, grasping the arm of the unresisting young man.

“Indeed, Master Basil, it will be safer to leave the room,”—cried Dorcas, becoming terrified in her turn.

“Basil?—*what* Basil?—ay, ay, another of *her* tricks! She wants to impose him upon my lord as his grandson; but she cannot deceive *me*! I am not yet so old, or so blind, as not to discover him through all his disguises; and from the moment he attempted to take the life of my master’s son, I swore his own should not be safe if he came hither again.—And now I have caught you!—As usual—as usual—as of old—stealing into the house like a thief in the dark, when others are asleep,—others suffering and weeping; ay, weeping tears of blood for the sorrows you have caused!—My poor young lady!”

Basil Annesley was now becoming really intimidated; not by the sense of his own danger, but by the dread of obtaining surreptitious insight into the secrets of his mother. The word “Jew,”—the allusion to blood,—to family sorrow,—to family disgrace,—caused his own blood to thrill within his veins.

“Be calm, my poor old friend,” faltered he, in an altered voice, without attempting to disengage his arm from the grasp of the lunatic. “Look at me, Nicholas!—Recall me to your mind!—Remember little Basil—remember Basil Annesley!”—A sort of howl instantly burst from the infuriated patient,—a howl terminating in a burst of frenetic laughter.

“Annesley, forsooth!”—cried he. “Poor fool, poor fool!—poor cover to shame,—poor blind, blind dupe!—Annesley?—the victim of a cunning, paltry Jew! If your name be Annesley, again I say, away with ye!—Go hide yourself in the grave, as your father did before you! He swore he would!—He said nothing but death could efface such dishonor; a violent death—a bloody death. But the drops he shed in obtaining it, young man, wrought not half the anguish in the heart they burst from, that the tears of his repentant widow have wrung out of the depths of her own. Away with ye, I say again, and hide yourself,—child of the foulest father and guiltiest mother that ever called down upon the head of their offspring the judgments of God!”

Basil Annesley shuddered as he listened. The trembling fingers of the delirious sufferer still gripped his arm. But it was not their feverish hold which caused his heart to quail.—A heavy hand was upon his shoulder!—His mother stood beside him!—

Disturbed from her slumbers by the dreadful cry uttered by her distracted charge, Lady Annesley had risen in haste, and hurried, in her night-dress, to his chamber.—

She arrived there just in time to overhear the terrible revelations which had driven every tinge of color from the cheeks of her son.

CHAPTER VI.

THE humblest hovel of a village acquires temporary distinction from the periodical blossoming of the fine old honeysuckle adorning its crumbling walls, and investing the desolate place with beauty and fragrance; and even into the miserable lodging of a gloomy city, momentary brightness may be infused by the chance introduction of a summer flower, whose rich perfumes brings tidings of a happier world elsewhere.

So was it with the humble abode of Verelst the painter. Nothing could be more dull, more dreary, more dispiriting than the spot.—The house, of which his lodgings occupied the first and second floors, was old and disjointed: and though an ancient stone mansion becomes picturesque when falling into ruins, the slight and ill-conditioned London houses, run up by bricklayers’ contracts, degenerate, at the end of a century, into a collection of creaking boards, without a perpendicular line or right angle perceptible in the whole construction. Shrunk doors, and ill-fitting windows, admit eddies of air in all directions; while the sallow paint, dingy floors, smoky ceilings, and rickety stairs, present a miserable and dispirited combination.

In Verelst’s lodgings, selected for the advantage of the better light reaching the artist’s chamber over the open space of a small burying-ground backing on North Audley Street, all was as clean as care and friction could make it. But the care applied to the burnishing of shabby furniture renders its inferiority only more prominent; and no person accustomed to the resorts of luxury, or even to habits of comfort, could have entered Verelst’s apartments on the day they were first engaged by the poor painter, without experiencing the heavy depression arising from the survey of utter discomfort.

He had not been established three days, however, before those cheerless rooms had assumed the importance acquired by the roughest casket enshrining some precious object. Two beings, more graceful of form and feature than even the imagination of the gifted painter could have supplied, were dispensing their charm over the place; and, in addition to the gentle presence of Esther and Salome, the rooms were brightened by a variety of those trivial but striking objects which betoken the presence of an artist,—intrinsically valueless, so as to be compatible with poverty,—yet indicative of superior intelligence and refinement.

On wooden brackets against the wall were placed two of the finest pictures of Verelst; which not only concealed the faded paper, but created an atmosphere of grace and poetry, where all before was matter of fact. Beside the fire-place, in a recess formed by the abutting chimney usual in old-fashioned houses, stood a curious carved cabinet; common enough in the quaint old cities of Holland and Germany, but acquiring a certain dignity amid the commonplace vulgarity of a London lodging-house. On the top of this, lay a thick, strange-looking volume, apparently as antiquated and curious as the cabinet itself; for its clumsy silver clasps were blackened with age, and the binding was of the dingy and solemn character peculiar to monastic libraries. This precious book was an object of all but idolatry to the painter. On removing to that wretched house from the abode in Bermondsey in which he had installed himself on his first arrival from Germany, Verelst carried it devoutly under his arm; leaving the care of his goods and chattles, and even of his infirm wife, to the hands of his daughters. The utmost extremity of poverty would not have induced him to part with it;—in the first place, because it was a gift,—a token of gratitude from one of his scholars, the young Count of Ehrenstein, who, on quitting the University, had despatched it from his ancestral castle in the Odenwald to his old master; in the second, because it was a treasure of no less magnitude than the sketch-book of Albert Durer!

Great must have been the importance of any individual in the eyes of Verelst ere he admitted him to view the contents of that sacred volume; and, during the three years of his residence in England, Basil Annesley alone had beheld those venerable clasps unlocked in his honor!

If the truth must be told, the favor was somewhat thrown away.—Those sublimer touches of art which it requires the eye of an artist to detect,—those curious insights into the mysteries of nature which demand initiation on the part of the spectator to whom they are demonstrated,—were as much lost upon the young guardsman, as the beauties of a Phidian *torso* to the eye of a child, who sees only a headless trunk, defaced and time-worn, where the virtuoso beholds the breathing *chef d’œuvre* of the first of sculptors. Basil Annesley, however, though too frank for dissimulation on ordinary matters, was careful not to wound the pride of the sensitive artist, by exhibiting his indifference. He had conferred too many favors on Verelst, to mortify him by disparaging his only treasure. Even the weaknesses, moreover, of the father of Esther were sacred in his sight!

It would have afforded no consolation to the enthusiastic painter, to learn that any human being could be blind enough to appreciate what he estimated as his own puny efforts of art, far beyond the curious jottings and outlines, by which the quaint old master had attempted to lay by stores for the aid of future invention, in his mysterious repository;—snatches of the picturesque,—of striking effects,—of graceful combinations,—which displayed, in many instances to eyes profane, only uncouth blottings, and unmeaning devices. For nothing could exceed the contempt with which Verelst regarded the works to which the exigencies of his position compelled him to descend. The wants of his family obliged him to paint down to the taste of the most unimaginative nation in Europe; and the two noble works constantly before his eyes, for which he had never so much as received an offer, but which, during their composition and the two years devoted to their execution, had appeared to contain the germs of fame and fortune, nay, in his more enthusiastic

moments, to foreshow glimmerings of immortality,—afforded a perpetual memento that subjects taken from the *Nibelungen Lied*, even if treated with the power of Caravaggio and the grace of a Corregio, possess not half the charm in English eyes of a sporting scene in the Highlands, or some comicality of cockney life.

The bitter lesson was now learned. But it had required the contemptuous refusal of a dozen picture-dealers, to convince Verelst that the higher efforts of modern genius were valueless, unless when stamped as saleable by the prefix of a well-known name, accredited by the magic letters R. A.;—whereas for the humorous *Croquis* and sporting studies, such as Colonel Carrington had found so profitable a possession, a ready market was at command.

By the sale of these, the artist maintained his family; and he might have maintained them in opulence, could he have brought himself fully and entirely to the level of his position. But the mind of Verelst was pitched to a lofty key. To him it was as much an effort to descend to these profitable puerilities, as for other men to attain to the higher inspirations of art; and often, when engaged to complete for the trade some vulgar series of military groups or hunting adventures, he would fling away the pencil with disgust, and snatching the palette, in a fit of desperation, paint out some former picture, in order to give existence to a new design,—the faint shadowing of some poetical idea,—never, alas! to be fully developed. For there were no Roman princes, no luxurious cardinals, to give food to the family of the necessitous artist while abandoning himself to the nobler promptings of his genius. When mildly remonstrated with by his feeble wife, he replied by citing the victory he had already attained over himself, by producing for lucre's sake works revolting to his taste. But it was like converting a lance of polished steel into a homely instrument of husbandry, to abstract the soul of Verelst from the higher walks of his art.

It is true, that in his two girls he had unconscious flatterers, strongly inciting him to the cultivation of his nobler aspirations. Whenever, in irresistible moments of fervor, the poor artist gave the reins to his imagination, so as to produce anew some wild but exquisite design illustrative of the poetry of his native country, Salome and Esther, by their fond enthusiasm, not only stimulated his exertions, but almost repaid them. Nevertheless, their murmured applauses, their glistening eyes, their flushing cheeks,—grateful as was the tribute to his heart, not only as a token of affection, but as indicative of the possession of genius sympathetic with his own—did not suffice to satisfy his weekly creditors, or defray the rent of even his inconsiderable lodging. The poor paralytic mother, whose sickness was the real source of their poverty, often entreated the two girls to be more sparing in their admiration. With the wisdom of experience, the infirm wife of Verelst recognised the futility of struggling against destiny. She knew, that to achieve the laurels of glory requires more than the mere possession of genius; that there must be favorable coincidences of time and place, and, above all, of national tastes and prosperity, to create a field for the triumph of art, and the renown of the artist.

Mrs. Verelst was a woman of no common order. Born of an opulent family, she had eloped in early girlhood from her father's house with the enthusiastic artist; and ill-prepared by habits or education for the life of privation she had embraced, her health had fallen a sacrifice, and increased the evil. From the period of her younger daughter's birth, in consequence of premature exertion, she had become crippled; a burthen upon the family, save for the pains she was enabled to bestow upon the education of the girls. Though enfeebled by infirmity, she was unwearied in imparting to her daughters the accomplishments in which she excelled; and even now, though confined at all times to an easy chair, and often to her bed, her industrious hands were constantly exercised for the benefit of the family.

Sore had been the trial to this patient invalid to uproot herself from the humble but cheerful home at Heidelberg to which she had been so long habituated; and exchange the view from her windows over the rippling waters of the Neckar, and the crowning heights of the green forests beyond, for the foggy, smoky, cheerless limitation of a narrow London street. Though of British extraction, she had never abided in England; and became as quickly conscious as any foreign visiter, of the oppressive cost of ordinary enjoyment in a city which supplies no gratuitous pleasures. If, however, either the mother or daughters pined after the purer atmosphere and franker sociability of Heidelberg, they were cautious not to afflict by their lamentations the inconsiderate man by whose want of caution they had been driven into exile.

The artist enjoyed in his family an impunity something between a reverence accorded to a prophet, and the indulgence conceded to an ailing child. His whims were studied, his foibles respected. Whatever evils befell them, it was the common care that they should fall lightest on the father. Among themselves, the disinterestedness of mind and exaltation of character which had reduced them to ruin, commanded a degree of respect that did them honor; and the two girls seemed to feel that they could not better testify their affection for their suffering mother, than duty towards the improvident father she so dearly loved.

"How lonesome we have been, these four days past!" observed Verelst, as he stood retouching a picture upon the easel, the contemplation of which he had a thousand times forsworn.—"Not a single visiter the whole of this week!"

The two girls, who sat working at the same embroidering-frame, waiting till their mother, who was reclining in her arm-chair, should feel disposed to resume the book she had been reading aloud to them the greater part of the morning, looked at each other and smiled,—or rather mutually refrained from a smile. For the only guests who ever crossed their threshold were Basil Annesley, and three or four printsellers and picture-dealers, by whom Verelst was occasionally employed.

"I want cheering up, for the continuation of my military grouping!" resumed the artist. "I have been obliged to take up the brush instead of the pencil to-day, for want of some one to advise me respecting that charge of Polish lancers."

"He is out of town, father. He is gone into Hampshire," said Esther, vaguely enough, in reply to her father's observation.

"Besides," added the feeble voice of Mrs. Verelst, who, though sitting with her eyes closed, was not dozing, as they had supposed, "even if he were in town, Mr. Annesley has sense enough to know that it is not expedient for him to be a daily visiter in a house like ours,—that it must be injurious to him, and fatal to us."

"Why so?" inquired the painter, without raising his eyes from his work. "He used to come to us every day, at Heidelberg?"

"He was your pupil,—he was eagerly studying the German language, and society was an object to him."

"Not more an object to him there, than his society here to me."

"Besides, Mr. Annesley was then fifteen, and Esther and Salome children of eleven and twelve."

"And is there not precisely the same difference of age between them now?"

"Certainly! But there is a very great difference in the construction others might place upon their intimacy!"

"Their intimacy?—My dear wife, you are dreaming!" cried the painter, almost smiling at her simplicity, and not in the least suspecting his own. "Their intimacy?—Surely you do not suppose that this excellent young man, who, though I never was able to endue him with much artistic perception, made good progress under my hands, (as his *aquarelle* yonder of the old Castle of Heidelberg, pasted into the lid of Esther's workbox, can testify,) this promising scholar of mine, I say, who has been of such essential service to us during our sojourn in this inhospitable country, cannot come and visit his old master, and advise him in his compositions so as to adapt them to the vulgar appetites of his customers, without provoking remarks by his condescension?—At all events, what have my daughters to do with it?—It is not Salome's pencils he sits pointing. It not Esther's drawings, of which he suggests the subject?"

"Mr. Annesley has gone down to visit his invalid mother, papa," interposed Esther, apprehensively, perhaps, that her father might take cognizance of her tingling cheeks, or his wife consider it necessary to inspire him with a more worldly view of their relative position.

"Has he a mother?" inquired the artist,—who took little heed of the ordinary business of life. "I always fancied from his independence that he was an orphan, and his own master."

"Do you not remember our first interest in him at Heidelberg originating in the letters he showed us from Lady Annesley?"

"True,—I remember!—Grave, cordial, heart-stirring letters.—But as he never mentioned her here, I thought she might have died in the interim. And so she is an invalid? and the reason, perhaps, Rachael, why he interests himself so kindly in your illness,—and is always suggesting some comfort or relief for you.—It is such a kind-hearted creature!—I miss him, after a few days' absence, as I should miss one of you, were you to go away from me."

"Mr. Annesley is very kind,—very affable,—very condescending," said Mrs. Verelst, coldly, as if to give a discouraging view to their terms of friendship.

"But surely we are of as much service to him, mother, as he is to papa in the composition and sale of his drawings?"—observed Salome. "Mr. Annesley has a charming voice; but it is Esther's instructions which have enabled him to do it justice."

"So long as he comes as a pupil," persisted Mrs. Verelst, "he comes on appropriate terms. But highly born as he is, and as I presume, of good hereditary fortune, there can be no equality, and, consequently, no real friendship between him and us. We are people earning our subsistence by our exertions. He is a gentleman,—a fine gentleman."

"He is a man!" cried Verelst, suddenly throwing down his brush, and assuming a tone of energy very unusual to him.—"He is my benefactor, too:—but I should hate myself, and despise him, if I thought that any obstacle to his being my friend."

His wife remained silent; aware of the hazard of introducing suspicion into that simplest of human hearts. A woman's tact forewarned her that, if made to feel the danger and delicacy of their position as regarded Basil Annesley, he would feel it so acutely as to render all further intimacy between them impossible.

Before Verelst had resumed his brush or the girls recovered their apprehensions that some unpleasant explanation was about to ensue, a knock was heard at the street door, and a step on the stairs; and every one in the room uttered an exclamation of delight to welcome the arrival of—Basil Annesley!

CHAPTER VII.

"My good Mr. Annesley—my dear young friend!" exclaimed the painter, "these girls told me just now, you had been in the country nursing a sick relative. Are you quite sure you have not taken her disorder? I never saw you look so ill, since the time of your fever at Heidelberg, when we had you into our house for change of air!"

"You remind me of one of the happiest epochs of my life!" cried Basil, suddenly acquiring all the bloom of which Verelst was quite justified in accusing him of being deficient.

"Ay—now you look somewhat more like yourself again!" cried the painter. "Now you are a fitter object for the artist's studio!—You cannot imagine, my dear sir, how I have wanted you!—The sketches cannot get on without you. If you had remained long in the country I should have been ruined!—I wanted spirits to proceed to business during your absence; but since you are here again, I will push back the King of Taule in disgrace into his corner.—Salome, bring forward the drawing-table!"

And while the young man was bending over the chair of the invalid, inquiring anxiously into the events of the four or five last days, without heeding the garrulity of his old master, the change was accomplished. On Basil's release from his almost filial attentions to the worn and wasted, yet still beautiful invalid, all was in readiness to be set in movement, by his advice touching the helmets of Prussian lancers, and the boots of Hungarian pandours.

Taking the chair placed for him by Salome close beside the artist, he proceeded, with patient good-humour, to play the critic on the spirited military groups, in which it was indeed difficult to point out a fault, save in trifling accessories of costume. So animated were the charges, so admirable the equestrian combinations, that Basil, instead of enlarging on a few errors of equipment, fell, as usual, into rhapsodies at the spirit and originality of the whole.

It was probably the stimulus of this very enthusiasm which had been wanting to Verelst; for in a moment his chalks were in full activity, and Basil at leisure to perceive that the seat provided for him by Salome commanded a view of the embroidery frame over which the graceful heads of the two girls were stooping together. It was only natural that he should thenceforward divide his attention between the withered hand, under which was growing into life a rude bridge over a mountain torrent, hotly defended by a legion of Tyrolese peasants, armed with the picturesque wildness of irregular warfare, against a trimly detachment of French light infantry, in all the studied equipment of military array,—and the fairy fingers of the sisters, as they flew over their work. Though the hands of the two girls were closely intertwined as they sat together, so that the slight form of the one almost effaced the still slenderer figure of the other, the eyes of Basil had no difficulty in detecting the hand so dear to him,—the hand which had trembled on his sudden entrance,—and which now, in the joy of his presence again in that chamber, was performing thrice the work effected by the less-interested Salome; who was sufficiently at her ease to contemplate, every now and then, at idle leisure, the venerable figure of her father, contrasted with that of the handsome young visitor bending over him while watching the efforts of his pencil. Placed as Salome was, she was, of course, enabled to see that, ever and anon, his eyes wandered furtively towards Esther; from the detection of whose downcast looks he knew himself to be secure.

"Do you happen to know anything, Mr. Annesley, of a family named Maitland?" suddenly inquired Mrs. Verelst, after exercising, perhaps, the same unnoticed scrutiny as Salome.

Annesley started, and looked confused.

"They live in Arlington Street," added Esther, in a low voice, taking this opportunity to lift her eyes to his face, and surprised, in her turn, to find it covered with conscious blushes.

"The son is a brother-officer of mine," replied he, gradually recovering his self-possession.

"It is, then, as we have supposed, to you that Esther is indebted for her introduction to the family!" observed Mrs. Verelst.

"Introduction?" repeated Basil, in evident surprise.

"I received an hour ago, a note, signed Lucy Maitland, begging to know my terms of tuition, and requesting me to be in Arlington Street at three o'clock to-morrow," said Esther, in explanation.

The former confusion of countenance of Basil Annesley was now a thousand times augmented. The idea of Esther Verelst—his Esther—a singing mistress to those flighty girls, the Misses Maitland,—in that showy, heartless house,—subjected to the gaze of the "string of puppies" frequenting it,—exposed to the silly impertinence of Lady Maitland,—condemned to all the ignominy inflicted on a teacher, by people of empty heads and callous hearts!

"And has Miss Verelst engaged herself?" said he, addressing the mother.

"She merely wrote accepting the appointment for to-morrow,

when there will probably be little difficulty in adjusting the question of terms and hours," replied the invalid.

"You do me too much honor in supposing that the recommendation came from me," said Annesley, after a pause, in which he had been balancing the evils likely to arise to the beautiful Esther Verelst from such a connexion, against the advantage to the necessitous family of an additional guinea a-week earned by their exertions. "I should scarcely have suggested a place likely to expose a person so timid as Est—as Miss Verelst, to the constant notice and molestation of precisely the order of people whose familiarity drove her from the rehearsals at the opera. The advantage to be derived would be dearly purchased by exposure to the habits of a house, of all others of my acquaintance the one into which I should be least disposed to introduce a sister of my own."

Esther was satisfied. The pang excited in her bosom by Basil's confusion at the first mention of the name of Maitland, was gradually subsiding.

"Surely," observed Salome, little suspecting the new vexation to which she was about to give rise, "Maitland was the name of the ladies with whom we saw you one night at the opera?"

"I scarcely recollect," stammered Basil, with some embarrassment.

"Oh! yes—we met you on the stairs with a beautiful fair girl on your arm—whom you hurried into a carriage, and returned to assist us. I remember hearing it announced as that of Lady Maitland."

"How can you recollect such trash, child!" interrupted Verelst. "Annesley! what think you of placing the stout fellow with the scythe, who is striking down the standard of France, on the broken parapet of the bridge?"

"Admirable!" cried Basil, glad to direct his eyes towards the drawing at which he had been hitherto only pretending to look. "It will make a modern edition of the famous battle of the Standard. But what a pity, sir, to throw away this exquisite design on a series for which you are so miserably paid? Why not place it in the gorge of a mountain pass, and execute it in oils?"

"Ay, why not?" cried the artist, recalling at that moment his order to mind for the two battle-pieces, and justly surmising that Mr. Stubbs had neither art nor learning enough to detect the anachronism, if such a study were made the companion to a skirmish of the *condottieri* of Sir John Hawkwood and the Cardinal de Bourbon; and little suspecting the anxiety of mind with which this interruption of their conversation was causing to his favourite daughter.

"Esther has been setting to music, since you have been gone, those pretty words you brought her the last time you were here," observed Mrs. Verelst, after her husband and his guest had sufficiently debated together the question of the new Battle of the Standard, which was to rival that of Leonardo.

"I thought she would like them!" cried Basil, again raising his eyes, and meeting those of Esther with a degree of frankness that almost satisfied her he was not actuated by fear of exposing his own flirtations to her examination, in opposing her entrance into the Maitland family.

"And a fine melancholy ditty she has made of them," added her father.

"They were appropriate only to a minor key," observed Esther, in an apologetic tone.

"Will you not let me hear the ballad, and judge for myself?" inquired Basil.

"I am so afraid of not satisfying your expectation!" said Esther, rising, however, instantly from her work. "I am sure they are favourite verses of yours, or you would not have been at the trouble of copying them."

"Show me the man who would like his favourite verses the less from hearing them sung by such a voice as yours, Esther!" said her father fondly. And it was, perhaps, the dread of further enconiums which hastened the blushing girl in her preparations for complying with Mr. Annesley's request, by throwing open the door of her mother's room, in which (in submission to the requirements of the artist's studio) stood the piano.

Sweet as it was expressive was the ritournelle that prefaced Esther Verelst's articulate and melodious recital of the following stanzas:—

BALLAD.

Yes! other eyes may brighten, love,
When gazing upon thine,
As gloomiest brooks runs glittering where
The shedding sunbeams shine.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
Mine own would brighter be;
Content thee, then, with smiles from them,
And bear with tears from me!

Yes! other tones may soften, love,
When to thine ear I address,
As breezes lulled the barque allure
O'er ocean's treacherous breast.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
My words would smoother be;
Content thee, then, with praise from them,
And bear with truth from me!

Yes! other arms may bear thee, love,
O'er fortune's flowery way;
Mine, with unwearied fervent faith,
Abide the darker day.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
My aid would prompter be!
Content thee, then, with pleasing them,
And keep thy love for me!

To the utter mortification of poor Esther, not a word of commendation broke from Annesley at the conclusion of her performance. Her father exclaimed—"Brava, my girl! charming, charming!"—but the voice of Annesley was mute. The piano commanded no view of the room in which her auditors were seated; and she had consequently no means of surmising that if her ungracious friend uttered no common phrase of compliment, it was because his feelings were far too deeply excited for words. Salome, who had watched his tearful eyes during the exquisite song of her sister, was satisfied.

"After all, this is a doleful ditty to salute a friend with on his return," observed the artist, also noticing the silence of Basil, and with a glance detecting the cause, which he justly attributed to the sensitiveness produced by a previous shock on his spirits. "You forget, my Esther, that Mr. Annesley is come to us from the sick-room of one he loves, and that he wants cheering."

"I am always cheered when I find myself so kindly welcomed to this fireside," said Basil, attempting to rally his spirits; "in the first place, by your cordiality; in the second, by the sight of your rational occupations. The do-nothing, good-for-nothing world I live in, contains few sights so pleasant."

"I fancied," said Salome, "that the ladies of England were highly enlightened and accomplished?"

"Superficially accomplished. They learn as much music and drawing and as many languages, as can be taught for money; but nothing is done to cultivate that intellectual sense which renders such acquirements available."

"And these Miss Maitlands, Esther's pupils?" demanded Salome, returning to the charge.

"Your sister has decided, then, on accepting their tuition?" demanded Basil, in a constrained tone, as Esther, after closing her instrument, returned into the sitting-room.

"I scarcely know what pretext I could find for refusing," she observed, in a timid voice, resuming her former place.

"Would you favor me with a sight of Miss Maitland's letter?" inquired Annesley.

"The letter!—Willingly!"—said Mrs. Verelst, producing it from a paper-rack on the table beside her chair.

"This is the handwriting of the brother, who is in the same regiment with myself," observed Basil, after examining the letter, having from the first surmised the possibility of a hoax on the part of his brother officers. "If you permit me, I will make inquiries of Lady Maitland concerning her intentions; and bring you an exact account, before you give yourself the trouble and annoyance of a long walk this cold weather, for the sole purpose, perhaps, of gratifying unjustifiable curiosity."

"But what curiosity can poor Esther have excited among persons to whom she is known only by name?" inquired Mrs. Verelst, mistrustfully.

"Pardon me,—she is personally known to Lady Maitland's son, who has probably mentioned her to his sisters. Surely," said he, turning suddenly round to Esther for confirmation, "you remember the tall, fair, young man, so frequently with old Colonel Carrington, who accosted us at the stage-door on the day you made that hasty exit from rehearsal?"

"Perfectly!" replied Esther, now fully enlightened as to the origin of his objection, "and I am consequently certain that it would be disagreeable to me to give lessons to Lady Maitland's daughters."

"Still, before you give a decided negative, which will, of course, be ungraciously construed, allow me to institute some inquiry into the object of the parties," resumed Basil. "I see these people daily. I will even make a point of going there to-night. Nothing will be easier than for me to discover, without compromising you, whether the young ladies have any serious intention of improving themselves under your hands, and requiting your trouble. The girls are good-natured, though silly and trifling; and would not, I should imagine, lend themselves to unladylike mystification."

Esther assented to this arrangement.

"As we shall meet again soon, I will shorten my visit now," continued Basil, rising from his seat, "but I must not go without accomplishing its real object. I have brought you a curiosity to look at, sir," resumed he, addressing Verelst, after drawing a small volume from his pocket. "Something in your own way—a little book which I borrowed from my mother."

"It was a scarce volume of Hollar's Engravings, after Holbein's Dance of Death, which was examined by Verelst with deliberation and enthusiasm."

"I know these designs," said he, "far better than I know any of my own! I spent a month at Basle, for the express purpose of studying the characteristics of that quaint old master. This is a curious copy, and seems enriched with original interleavings," he observed,

scrutinizing the volume with the eye of a connoisseur. "But what have we here?—there is an Arabic inscription on the title-page—or Sanscrit—or, stay!—*you* Rachael, can help us here. Are not these Hebrew characters?"

Basil Annesley took the open volume from the hands of Verelst, to convey it to his wife. On his way, he naturally glanced at the inscription, which was decidedly Hebrew, and written in ink almost invisible from age. But at the foot, in a modern handwriting, to his utter amazement, were inscribed the memorable initials of—A. O.!

Before he had recovered from the shock caused by this startling, though of course accidental coincidence, the whole attention of Basil was absorbed by the effect produced on Mrs. Verelst by the sight of the volume! Pale as death, with quivering lips, and suspended respiration, she sank back in her chair the moment the inscription was placed before her. Esther and Salome, whose attention was constantly directed towards the invalid, were by her side in a moment.

"Place a screen before the fire—I was afraid the room was too close for her!" faltered Esther, opening a large green fan which lay constantly on her mother's table.

"The ether, father!—you will find it on the dressing-table within," cried Salome; nor had either of them leisure to notice that it was by Basil, by whom, as by a devoted son, the commission was executed. The eyes of Mrs. Verelst, however, even after the application of the ether to her temples, remained closed, and her hands cold as marble.

The book, a glance at which, young Annesley could not forbear regarding as the origin of her sudden seizure, had now fallen on the floor. The dispiriting nature of the frontispiece (which represented the grisly skeleton of Death beguiling an old man into the grave by the music of a dulcimer) had probably conveyed an insupportable shock to the sensitive mind of the enfeebled invalid.

Some minutes elapsed before Mrs. Verelst evinced the smallest token of consciousness;—a longer period than Basil, who had often seen her overcome by faintness, had ever known her remain thoroughly insensible to what was passing around her. At length she slowly unclosed her eyes, and a faint murmur broke from her lips. Esther instantly bent down her head to listen; but Annesley, without any such effort, distinctly heard her exclaim—"My father—*who* was it spoke to me of my father?"—

"Better wheel her into her own room," interposed the artist, who, during the swoon of his wife, had stood aloof, distressed and helpless. "It is nothing—the heat of the fire—the sulphur of those detestable coals!—Let us all be quiet, and she will be herself again in a moment."

The artist then assisted his daughters to remove the invalid into an adjoining chamber, and young Annesley was left alone to his meditations. Their absence was so protracted, however, that Basil became alarmed, and just as he had made up his mind to ring the bell to gain further information relative to the condition of Mrs. Verelst, the old man made his appearance.

"A word with you, my dear Mr. Annesley," said he, suddenly, "where did you say that you had found that edition of Hollar?"

"I did not find it," replied Basil, "it is my own. For the credit of our taste, I am proud to say that the book is a family possession."

"Most strange!" murmured the old man.

"Why strange?" inquired Basil. "There is nothing, I believe, very rare in the volume. I hardly ever saw a considerable book-sale that did not contain a copy."

"Perhaps so; but not *that* copy."

"Of course not. It has been in our family library these hundred years."

"You use the term hundred in a figurative sense," added Verelst.

"As my own age does not amount to a quarter of the period, I can scarcely give my personal attestation," observed Basil, with a smile. "But such of my mother's books as did not belong to my father's bachelor library, were probably derived from that of her father, the late Lord L——."

"Lord L——?" exclaimed the painter, again seizing the sleeve of Annesley. "You do not mean to say that *you* are the grandson of that man?"

"Perhaps you knew him," said Basil, evasively. "He was more than once, I fancy, employed in missions at the courts of Germany!"

Verelst was silent,—absorbed in reflection.

"Were you acquainted with my grandfather?" again demanded Basil, resolved to obtain an answer.

"I never saw him. Lord L—— was ambassador at Vienna at the breaking out of the French Revolution. I was then a child."

"May I ask, in my turn," inquired Basil, "what particular interest you attach to the copy of Hollar?"

"Five minutes ago I would have answered you without hesitation," replied Verelst, in a voice tremulous from agitation. "Now, I must reflect. Inscrutable are the ways of Providence!" faltered the artist, after a few minutes' pause. "That ever I should be indebted for what is dearer to me than my life,—the welfare of my family,—to the grandson of——But no matter!" said he, checking his ejaculation. And Basil was too much struck by the profound emotion of the gray-haired artist, to persist in his inquiries. He

therefore abruptly took his leave, without waiting for the reappearance of the girls.

It was dusk when Basil emerged from the house; and a desolate winter rain was falling in torrents, splashing into the overflowing kennels, and almost obscuring the light of the lamps. As the young guardsman reached the junction of the small street in which Verelst's house was situated, with South Audley street, in attempting to muffle himself in his cloak in resistance to the driving rain, he encountered what, at the first shock, he conceived to be the lamp-post! But on recoiling, he found that, in addition to the lamp post, he had struck against an individual combating the gusts of wind with a disabled umbrella. Something irresistibly ludicrous in the dilemma of his brother in distress, attracted his attention to the struggling wayfarer; when lo! by the light of the lamp, he recognised the marked and well-remembered features of Abednego the Money-lender!

The encounter was untimely; but Basil would not shrink from recognising the man by whom he had been so greatly obliged.

"We have untoward weather for our walk," said Annesley, lending his assistance to reverse the obstinate resistance of the reeking cotton umbrella.

"Unpleasant enough; and *you*, who walk for pleasure, might, I should think, spare your pains for a happier moment," rejoined the harsh voice of Abednego. "With *me* the case is different."

"Different indeed! since you have the means of commanding any sort of equipage you please: while I have at my disposal only that enjoyed by our father Adam."

"And how long should I enjoy the means, pray,—were I to lavish them on costly equipages?" rejoined the Money-lender. "Not a year!—not a month, perhaps, were I tempted into such ridiculous prodigality. I might be reduced to the same beggarly shifts which bring so many fine gentlemen shuffling, nay, all but begging to my door! For whether people beg for a loan or beg for a gift, where lies the mighty difference? They are still beggars. Are you bound for St. James's, young sir? If so, we may become a mutual benefit. Your arm is strong enough to hold up the umbrella; and by taking mine, we may share it between us. Don't be afraid!—In such weather as this, none of your fine friends will be astir. No one will recognize the gallant Mr. Basil Annesley cheek-by-jowl with A. O.!"

"It is no such consideration—" Basil was beginning.

"Away with ye then, and make an end of the discussion," interrupted Abednego, practically enforcing his advice. "Satisfy your scruples by the certainty that you have a second time rendered service to a man who is more than ready to render service to you."

Partly carried away by his companion's impetuosity, and partly curious of further insight into his eccentric character, Basil suffered himself to be disposed of. In another minute, he found himself sole occupant of the wet flagstones with the mysterious Abednego.

"But surely, sir, at your age," said he, by way of renewing the conversation, "the enjoyment of personal comfort must be a greater object than the amassment of mere wealth?"

"Who is to determine a man's notions of personal comfort?" cried the Money-lender. "And what do you mean by mere wealth? My notion of personal comfort is independence of hirelings—whether man or beast; and as to wealth, what is there in this world beyond it?—What else controls the march of empires—the progress of civilization—the development of science—the cultivation of art? What but money causes the crucible to glow,—sinks the shaft,—launches the balloon into the sky—or plunges the diving-bell into the depths of the ocean? Of what metal is composed the key of the poet's imagination—the orator's eloquence—the physician's skill—the divine's zeal and fervor?—Of gold, sir—of current gold!—He who hath *that*, commands kings on their thrones, or philosophers in their cabinets! Talk not to me of the refinements of art. If I want to enjoy them, I buy up both art and artists—an orchestra of musicians—a legion of sculptors or painters! Your capitalist, boy—your capitalist is the only solid sovereign of modern times!—'Mere wealth?' quotha. I knew that you were a boy, Basil Annesley, but I held you not for a child!"

The young man could scarcely resist a smile at the impetuosity of his companion.

"I perfectly agree with you sir," said he at last. "But it was by fully estimating the value of money as a means of commanding enjoyment, that I expressed my surprise at your preferring a wet walk to a luxurious carriage."

"Does the sportsman find the greater pleasure in the flavor of his game, or the pursuit of the chase?" demanded Abednego, in a sterner voice. "Have you not strength of mind to figure to yourself the intensity of enjoyment which a man, appreciating the true value of money, may find in the combinations by which he adds thousands to thousands,—ingot to ingot?—Even as the artist whose family you have just quitted" (Basil found it impossible to repress a start!) "finds exquisite delight in the progress of a picture by whose perfectionment he hopes to attain profit and fame, does the Money-monger glory in the machinery by which his enrichment is accomplished. Even economy—even privation—has charms, when tending towards the achievement of the grand object of his life! Ay, in —abject as it may seem to you, the Money-lender's is a glo-

rious calling!—Every minute of my life swells the amount of my possessions. Other men's property diminishes with their span of life;—mine, like the evening shadows, grows as the sun goes down. I am a wretch, eh?—a shabby threadbare wretch, with whom a smart officer like *you* is ashamed to be seen arm in arm! Shabby and threadbare as I seem, I tell you I hold in subjection those of whose acquaintance you are proud—those to whose acquaintance you barely aspire; Your fine ladies come and beg of me,—cajole me—flatter me!—cajole and flatter A. O. in his cobweb-tapestried halls of State.—'Mere wealth!'—What, but the wealth I have amassed by trudging in the rain while others swelter in carriages, brings the Duke of Rochester cringing to my feet, lying and swindling for the means of keeping up his empty state! His covetings of A. O.'s 'mere wealth' have converted that man, created by nature for honor and refinement, into an equivocating pettifogger. Ay, sir, you are shocked—you consider my tongue coarse and licentious!—You would plead privilege of peerage against the Money-lender, in favor of the uncle of your fribble acquaintance, young Wilberton." (Again Basil started.) "But when you have lived longer, you will come to the same conclusions. And now, good evening to you, Mr. Basil Annesley! for here we are, opposite to the Gloucester Coffee House, within hail of your out-at-elbows, discreditable friends, the Maitlands!—Good evening!—I should be as loth as yourself to expose you to the shame of being met skulking in the rain under the same ignominious umbrella with such a Barabbas as A. O.!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE party assembled at the Maitlands, in Arlington street, when Basil arrived, was about as usual, in point of numbers; and their conversation consisted of course in scandal, and their mirth in irony. The chief source of their gaiety lay at all times in quizzing old Carlington, or some other butt; and as the Dowager-colonel did not happen to be present when Basil entered, they were only too happy to attack him with raileries more agreeable to *them* than to himself.

"How dolorous he looks to-night!" cried John Maitland, extending a finger to the new comer, but without rising from the sofa on which he was lolling beside a handsome bold-eyed woman of a certain age. "I am afraid, Nancy, (a nickname given to Annesley among the subs, from his beardless aspect on joining the regiment,) I am sadly afraid you have taken cold!"

"On the contrary, it is nearly a degree warmer at Barlingham than in London," replied Basil, referring this abrupt conjecture to his country excursion.

A vociferous laugh was the sole answer to this explanation.

"None of your put-offs, my fine fellow!" cried John Maitland. "Here!—Blencowe,—Blencowe!—I tell Annesley that I am afraid he has caught cold in the rain this evening, and he tries to hum me by talking about his mother's thermometer!"

Captain Blencowe thus apostrophized, stationed himself on the scroll of the *chaise longue*, in an attitude little more ceremonious than that of his friend.

"I could scarcely suppose my movements of sufficient consequence," said Basil, somewhat nettled, "to make you aware that, a few hours after my arrival in town, I had enjoyed a wet walk."

"And in such company!" retorted Maitland—"arm in arm with an old beggarman under a cotton umbrella, which you left at the next corner!"

"*Reste a savoir*," cried the lady with the bold bright eyes, "which of the two was affording hospitality to the other?"

"If you have any interest in inquiring," said Basil, aware that to defeat a jester is best achieved by meeting him half-way, "the cotton umbrella was the property of my companion; and an enviable property I thought it, in that pelting shower!"

"He talks as reverentially as if the old gentleman were his grandfather!" cried John Maitland.

"I did not know that Nancy *had* a grandfather,—*extant*, I mean. (I was not going to parody the vulgar quiz on Brummell.) Of course I am aware, that there was once a Lord L—; and surmise, that a Sir Bernard Annesley was not produced out of a crucible," said Captain Blencowe, watching, from a distance, the impatience with which Lucy Maitland awaited Annesley's release from her brother.

"The old beggarman who appears to have excited your curiosity," said Basil, with some emphasis, "was no relation of mine; but simply a person who obliged me with shelter from the rain."

"From South Audley to St. James's street?" interrupted Blencowe.

"From South Audley to St. James's street!" coolly repeated Basil,—and all the more coolly, that he was conscious of being in a passion.

"If no relation of yours then, perhaps a relation of the pretty Jewess?" persisted Maitland, also vexed at finding that his jokes were missing their mark.

"What pretty Jewess?" persisted Basil. "I should think your acquaintance with the Jews likely to be quite as extensive as my own."

"I should have been extremely happy to improve it with the

lovely Esther," retorted Maitland; "but you and Carrington, or rather Carrington and you, were beforehand with me."

"If you allude to Miss Verelst," said Basil, gravely, "I have once or twice informed you, that she was as much a Jewess as *you* a Christian,—that is, in name alone. I am astonished, however, Maitland, that you should allude thus lightly to a lady whom you are anxious to introduce into your mother's house, as the preceptress of your sisters."

"Hear, hear, hear, hear, hear!" cried Maitland, in a voice that attracted the attention of the whole party. "Here is Nancy owning, with matchless audacity, that though only a few hours in town, he has been already playing the secretary, and examining the engagements of pretty Esther, the opera girl."

"Is there an opera girl of the name of Esther?" demanded Wilberton, who having been just elected of the Omnibus-box, felt bound to make himself Master of its Arts and Sciences.

"I believe *not*!" replied Basil, struggling to command himself; "certainly not in the person of the young lady to whom Maitland alludes. As he seems resolved to acquaint himself with everybody's business but his own, I am surprised he does not obtain better information."

"My dear Nan! I am now convinced that the shabby old fellow with the umbrella, whom Blencowe saw you skulking with in Piccadilly, is some near relation, or you would not be so deuced touchy at having been discovered!" cried young Maitland, starting from the sofa, and slapping Annesley provokingly on the shoulder.

"If Blencowe *did* see me with the individual in question," cried Basil, harassed out of his self-possession, "I wonder he did not give a more correct account; since the stranger was an acquaintance of his long before he became an acquaintance of mine!"

"An acquaintance of Blencowe's?"—cried John Maitland, while Loftus, Wilberton, and several others, crowded round on perceiving, by the tone of the parties, that something was going wrong.

"An acquaintance of Blencowe" persisted Basil Annesley; "and an acquaintance of most of you beside;—being no other than the redoubtable A. O.!"

The silence of consternation instantly pervaded the giddy circle. It was the first time he had seen so astounding an effect result from mere mention of the cabalistic name of—A. O.!

The following morning, Basil, furred to the chin, to meet the nipping blasts of January, (a severe frost having dried the rain of the preceding evening,) made his way towards South Audley street:—he felt entitled to make early inquiries after the health of Mrs. Verelst. On reaching the house, however, his title was disputed. As if in anticipation of his visit, the maid-servant who opened the door, placed a packet in his hand, and informed him that the young ladies were "out," and Mr. and Mrs. Verelst "engaged."

The blood mounted into Basil's cheeks at this announcement. It was the first time he had ever found cause to suppose himself too frequent a visitor,—there or elsewhere. He had not advanced many steps from the door, when it occurred to him that the parcel in his great-coat pocket, which evidently consisted of the volume he had left with Verelst the preceding night, might contain a note of explanation. Proceeding, therefore, to the by-street on the opposite side of the Chapel, where he was secure from observation, he opened the packet.

Merely a few cold and dry lines from Verelst! "I return the book, and regret from my soul that you should have been induced to bring it!" afforded only new grounds for vexation and perplexity. He had evidently given offence to those whom his whole life was spent in exertions to serve and please; and without having the slightest clue to their grounds for resentment.

Ere he replaced the volume in his pocket, Basil was moved by an irresistible impulse to re-examine the inscription which had so singularly attracted the attention of the artist's family; and his curiosity thus specifically directed towards it, he saw, beyond all question that the letters A. O. were inscribed in precisely the same handwriting which had embodied his communications with Abednego Osalez!—

What could be the meaning of this? He remembered the book in his mother's possession as long as he could remember anything. At what preceding epoch could it have been the property of the Money-lender? That, having been so, it should have passed into the hands of another, was nothing very wonderful;—inasmuch as a person with the covetous propensities of Abednego, was likely to dispose of all or anything belonging to him, for a "consideration." But that he should have been a buyer or seller at so early an age, as for a book of his to pass into the possession of the late Lord L——, who, if living, would be eighty years old, appeared unaccountable.—As Basil Annesley replaced the volume in his pocket, strange surmises crossed his brain, to which he would have been ashamed to give a more positive form. He had always entertained a sort of mysterious horror of people of Abednego's nation and calling; and though he would have scornfully rebutted the assertion of another that he mistook his Greek street friend for the Wandering Jew, involuntarily there recurred to his mind the sentence of—"Thou shalt tarry till I come!"

"Considering all the friendly advice the old fellow gave me last

evening, as we were trudging together in the rain," mused Basil, while pursuing the self-same road he had so recently trodden arm-in-arm with A. O.,—"I am fully entitled to consider him a friend, and treat him as such.—I will make the best of my way, therefore, to Greek street; and ask him, in plain terms, whether the book was ever in his possession. If he should resent my intrusion, what then? I am not in his power.—I have already booked up my interest. He can but give me a gruff answer; and from an oddity like him, a gruff answer is easily endured."

To Greek street, accordingly, he proceeded, and soon found his way to the well-remembered door.—Alas!—huge papers, attached to the centre panes of the dining-room windows, announced, in printed capitals—

THIS CAPITAL ROOMY MANSION
TO BE LET,
ON A REPAIRING LEASE.
INQUIRE AT 49, DELAHAYE STREET,
WESTMINSTER,
Every day from 12 till 2.

"How provoking!" was Basil's involuntary ejaculation, as he stood contemplating the strange contrast of color between the white paper, (to give place to which the panes had been wiped,) and the filthy encrustations of the remainder of the windows. As the house, however, had appeared quite as uninhabited as now, on his first visit, he determined to make an attempt to enter; nor was it till he had both knocked and rung without effect several times, that he felt convinced of its abandonment by its strange proprietor. Giving up the point in despair, he proceeded on his way, resolved to visit Delahaye street the following day, at the early hour pointed out by the placard.

He had not proceeded far, however, when a jarring sound, and a sort of yearning curiosity, induced him to turn his head; when he perceived the door of the deserted house slightly opened, and the face of the dirty old woman peeping out. In a moment, he was back again; and having caught the eye of the grim portress, it was impossible for her to shut the door in his face.

"Is your master at home?" said he.

"Nobody lives here now but *me*," grumbled the old woman. "'Tisn't no fault of mine if I didn't answer the door. The owner of the house don't choose to pay taxes for it no more, till it's let: and only lets me live here, on condition that I answer no knocks or rings, and don't let myself be seen by the neighbors."

"Mr. Osalez, then, is *really* not at home?" inquired Basil.

The old Woman contracted her brows, as if for an effort of comprehension; then drew back the dirty flap of her cap, and screwed her left eye like a person hard of hearing.

"I inquired whether Mr. Osalez were at home?"

"A. O.'s to be spoke with at No. 49, Delahaye street, Westminster," she repeated, either not knowing or not choosing to know the proprietor of the uninhabited house, by any other designation. "I would not say as much to a stranger:—but I knows you has *had* dealings with him afore,—and so I don't mind!"

Basil Annesley pointed to the notice in the window, as sparing him all necessity for especial gratitude for her communication, and wished her good morning. As he made his way towards St. James's street, in a very different mood from that in which, three weeks before, he had pursued the same track, he could not but revert, with unspeakable irritation of mind, to his repulse at the door of the Verelsts. Never before had he felt so desirous of an interview with Esther!

Like most men of his age when passionately in love, Basil Annesley found little enjoyment in either pleasure or business with which the object of his affections had not some remote connection. In spite, therefore, of his intentions of proceeding straight from Greek street to his Club, he found himself, in less than an hour afterwards, at Storey's Gate; contemplating the narrow opening to Delahaye street, and as much cheered in spirits as is usually the result of a stirring walk in frosty weather.

He was now sufficiently acquainted with the eccentric habits of the Money-lender to perceive, without surprise, that the house to which he had been referred was just as dilapidated of aspect as the one he had just quitted. It was clear enough that the numerous temporary residences of Abednego, consisted of old houses, which he bought up on speculation, and inhabited till a favorable opportunity presented itself of getting them off his hands; and the mansion in Delahaye street, still more "roomy" than the "capital" one abandoned by the Money-lender in Soho, was to all appearance still gloomier and more ruinous. It was of red brick, having five windows in front, with a pretence at pilasters between; the said pilasters being also of brick, with capitals of carved wood-work supporting a heavy cornice,—of which the object was doubtful, unless it purported to assist in weighing down the frontage of the attic story to which it was appended, and the peaked, ill-tiled roofing above.

"Truly, an appropriate den for the strange old fellow!" murmured Basil, as he approached the door; to which, contrary to the usage of London houses, it was necessary to descend a step from the street;

finished probably after the completion of the house, which retained a sort of memorial air of antiquity among its modernized neighbors. He felt almost ashamed of presenting himself in broad daylight as a visiter, at a door which, he little doubted, was recognized by the neighborhood as the den of a money-lending Jew.

In order to excite as little notice as possible, he contented himself with a modest ring at the bell; and so leisurely were the movements of those appointed to answer the summons, that he had time to notice a sort of damp vault-like emanation from the area, which not even the frostiness of the atmosphere could overcome.—So stagnant was the air brooding over the flagstones encrusted in mounds with green moss, (now hoary in patches with rime,) that it seemed as though any person descending into that deserted area would have been as much in danger as asphyxiation, as in some mephitic well.

At length the door creaked or rather growled, on its hinges; and a starvling of a boy appeared—the redundant growth of whose shock of hair was perhaps destined to replace a general scarcity of habiliments; his outer garments being sufficiently ragged to show that nothing in the way of shirt interposed between them and his sallow skin.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Osalez," said Basil.

The urchin stared, but made no reply.

"I was referred to this house," persisted Basil, more and more ashamed of himself and his errand,—“from Greek street, Soho.”

"You're after hours!" said the boy, preparing to shut the door in his face.

"I know it," said Basil, placing his foot so resolutely on the threshold, as to render the attempt impossible; and at the same moment insinuating a coin into the hand of the boy, which, though sufficiently insignificant to have been flung contemptuously on the pavement by the door-opener of any other house in the street, was so much the most important ever clenched in the palm of the ragged page of the Money-lender, that he stood staring in stupid wonderment, instead of either persisting in excluding, or expressing his gratitude to the intruder.

"Are you Mr. Osalez's servant?" inquired Annesley, scarcely able to refrain from a smile.

"I'm Bill that sweeps the George street crossing," replied the boy, tugging the longest of the elf-locks overhanging his forehead, in token of gratitude to his benefactor. "I runs of errands for the old gentleman, and opens the door from noon till two. Only to-day, I stayed later to light a fire and set on the kettle, 'cos the old gentleman's poorly."

"He is at home then?—Be so good as to carry up this card, and say I'm waiting to speak to him"—said Annesley.

Thus certified of the claims and good intentions of the visiter, the boy invited him into the hall, while he proceeded to do his errand; and while the little sweeper, leaving his heavy shoes at the bottom of the square, creaking staircase, shuffled up stairs, Basil stood contemplating the dark but roomy hall, paved with black and white marble, which, by dirt and friction had now degenerated into grey and yellow; besides being cracked in many of the lozenge-shaped squares, and in others sunk into the flooring. In the angle formed by the dingy staircase, stood an old sedan chair, dropping into decay and covered with mildew, yet still retaining in its gilt mouldings tokens of aristocratic emblazonment.

Shuddering with cold and the depression produced by the gloom of a spot into which the daylight of that narrow street struggled imperfectly through the half-shuttered windows, Basil waited impatiently till the barefooted boy shuffled down again.

"Master'll see you,—you may walk up!" said Bill, pointing upward with his thumb, while resuming his shoes; having done which he disappeared towards the basement floor, leaving Basil to find his way unescorted to the presence of Abednego Osalez.

Concluding that he had only to follow the custom of morning visits, and enter the drawing-room, Basil walked leisurely up and opened the door that presented itself on the first landing. But with all his cognizance of the peculiarities of his host, he was not prepared for the scene that presented itself within. The drawing-rooms of which he had opened the door, though low, and rendered apparently lower, as in many old-fashioned houses, by a ceiling overlaid with ornaments and divided into compartments by beams of carved wood-work, were unusually spacious. Yet spacious as they were, not an alley presented itself by which Basil could penetrate into the interior, without the certainty of covering himself with dust and cobwebs, by collision with the heterogeneous objects crowded into the area;—pieces of antiquated furniture, articles of vertu, besides a variety of undefinable and describable things, which looked as if assembled together by a hasty removal in a fire or the sacking of a town, thirty years before, and abandoned ever since the dust-gathering and smoke gathering operations of Time.

Heaped on the floor, in one corner of the room, like potatoes in a barn or beans in a granary, lay the contents of a library; from their rich old bindings apparently valuable, but overgrown with dust and mould, like the bricks of some ruined pile.—To the left of the door on entering, stood a fine marble copy of the Venus de Medicis, which the prudery of the spiders had covered with draperies of black cob-

webs, that hung like draperies down to the very pedestal. Further on, was the Whetter, in bronze, on whose dark surface, on the contrary, the coating of dust, in ledges, assumed a lighter colour; and beyond, in all directions, were slabs of *pietra dura* slanting against which consoles of carved ebony, and bas reliefs in *rosso antico* and other precious marbles, side by side with tawdry French clocks, Dresden cups and Nankin vases; groupings of stuffed birds, which, by the fracture of their glass-cases, and the admission of the atmosphere had sacrificed their bright plumage to the moths; so that only the shrunken skin, skeleton stuffed with straw, and staring glass eyes, remained perceptible, in ghastly mockery of the skill of the naturalist. Crystal girandoles stood on the consoles, so encrusted with dust as to have lost all symptom of transparency; while of a magnificent copy of Correggio's *Notte* that stood frameless against a japan cabinet, the rats had gnawn off a corner! There was a species of altar with folding wings, such as are used for the travelling devotions of crowned or mitred heads, adorned with chasing, the work of Cellini or one of his pupils, which, though evidently of silver, was tarnished to the tint of bronze!

Never before had Basil Annesley contemplated so singular a waste of property! But that these precious objects were intermingled with trays of old iron, rolls of lead, and fragments of packing-cases, he would have compared this singular museum to the *bric a brac* shops he had visited on the Quai Voltaire at Paris, or in the Juden Gasse at Frankfort; saving that, in these, though the chaos of valuable works of art was quite as confused, the strictest cleanliness was observed to preserve the component objects from injury or disregard.

After a deliberate survey of the room, a glance at the coating of dust through which the coloring of a parquered floor, now so rare in London was faintly perceptible, convinced him that, for some time past, no foot but his own had crossed the threshold; and that he must pursue his search elsewhere after the proprietor of the extraordinary treasury he had thus invaded.

Closing the door carefully after him, he ascended another flight of stairs, and again opened the first door facing the landing. But the result on this occasion was nearly the same as on the first; with the exception that the warehouse of curiosities on the second floor, appeared exclusively devoted to the reception of pictures.

"My friend the Jew has evidently a taste for lodging as near as possible to the sky!" thought Basil, proceeding to the attic story; and as he noticed the increase of light and decrease of density in the humid atmosphere while continuing to ascend, he came to the conclusion that, were he a lodger in the old house in Delahaye Street, he should follow the example of its proprietor.

The door that now faced him on the landing was slightly ajar, as if purposely left so by the ragged page, by way of indication. Basil tapped slightly to warn the inmate of his approach, and a hoarse whisper bade him "Come in."

Before a smoking fire composed of small coal and shavings, the crazy grate containing which the stifling effluvia peculiar to rusty iron, in an old-fashioned *bergère* covered with the ragged remains of a rich brocade, which, in the days of Queen Anne and the Sedan chair below, had probably supported the graceful limbs of many a court beauty,—sat the Money-lender; enrobed in a faded but magnificent wrapper of velvet and sables, and with his strongly marked features and picturesque costume, looking as though he had been sitting for his picture to Rembrandt.

"I am afraid your wet walk has had a worse influence on you than on myself, Sir?" said Basil, struck by the hoarseness of the tones in which the old man attempted to inquire his business.

"A slight sore throat,—nothing more!" grumbled Abednego; "easily cured with a quarter of an ounce of gum-arabic and a pint of hot water; half the price of a hackney-coach fare!—What do you want with me?"

"So little," replied Basil Annesley, seating himself on a rickety straw chair opposite the invalid, "that I would have by no means troubled you had I imagined you were indisposed."

"Then why did you come at all?"—demanded the Money-lender, with surly abruptness.

"I came to ask you an idle question. You were in such perfect health and spirits when we parted yesterday evening, that I had no expectation of being so much an intruder as I find myself to-day.—I have been as far as Greek street in search of you."

"Do you want to take the old house on a repairing lease?" inquired Abednego, with a sneer. "You imagine, perhaps, that some of the money-bags of A. O. will be overlooked in the old cupboards and odd corners?"

"I have no views on your money-bags, Mr. Osalez, excepting such as you have found me very frank in declaring," replied Annesley, with a degree of steadiness that did him no disservice with one accustomed to be addressed in terms of abject subservience.

"Your question then, I am to conclude, simply regarded the state of my health?" retorted the Money-lender, the wrinkles which had ruckered the corners of his keen eyes into a sarcastic expression, gradually relaxing.

"Still less! I never saw a person more robust than my companion

of last night. I merely wished to ask whether you could give me any information concerning a volume in my possession, which bears on the title page your initials, inscribed in your own handwriting."

"I should be somewhat puzzled, I fancy," replied Abednego, with a hoarse chuckle, "to give you precise information concerning all the varieties of property which, one way or other, have passed thro' my hands! I buy whatever I can buy cheap, and sell it whenever I can sell it dear! The fools from whom I purchase, or who purchase from me, are of no more account in my eyes than one of the atoms of dust which your coat has imbibed by your recent visit to my lumber rooms!"

Following the indication of the old man's skinny finger, pointed towards him, Basil perceived that his scrupulously neat dress bore unsatisfactory traces of the filmy drapery of the Venus de Medicis.

"With such feelings," resumed Abednego, on perceiving that his young visitor evinced no fastidious tokens of disgust at the misadventure which had befallen him, "I do not often set my mark on those temporary belongings,—any book in which I ever inscribed my initials, must have been a book I valued!"

"You can scarcely have failed to value a work so interesting as this!" replied Basil, drawing from his pocket the volume he had brought from Barlingham, for the amusement of Verelst, and placing it before Abednego, so as to bring the inscription under his eyes.

To his utter surprise, the effect produced on Osalez by the sight was scarcely less remarkable than that which it had wrought in the mother of Esther! The old man fell back in his chair and, for a moment appeared to gasp for breath; while Basil sat watching him with uneasy consternation.

"That boy takes as long to boil my hot water, as a chemist to compound a medicine!" were the first words that burst from the quivering lips of Abednego, as if in apology for his emotion; "yet I told him I was choking with my sore throat!"

"Will you give me leave to ring sir?" said Basil, perceiving that his singular host was desirous of evading his observation.

"I give you leave to find a bell,—if you are able!" retorted the old man, as though priding himself on the denuded condition of his habitation. "No, no!—no bells here, my fine captain, nor menials to answer them! No knaves in showy liveries, like those who held the great coat on your back for you, last night, at my lady Maitland's, who have received no wages save their pickings, stealings and perquisites, these two years past! If there were indeed such a thing in this old house as an unbroken bell-wire, it would serve only to frighten the poor rats, who are as much masters here as myself. I have no servant except the beggar boy who showed you in."

"And do you consider such an unprotected state safe, sir, with such an amount of property in the house?"—inquired Basil, wishing to give him time to recover his first surprise ere he renewed his inquiries.

"The half-starved terrier I let loose at night, is a better guard than a company of the household brigade!" replied Abednego; who had thrust the volume aside on the table, as if not choosing to encounter a second view.

"But even if the dog gave the alarm in your infirm state?"—

"This is the first day's illness I have had these twenty years; and you may perceive that I am prepared to take care of myself!" interrupted the old man, suddenly opening the drawer of the table beside him, and taking out a brace of pistols, on half cock, which he quietly replaced,—having evidently exhibited them to reassure, not to intimidate his guest.

"Besides, the police have their eye on my house. I have them in fee as I have the insurance offices, as a matter of business."

"But the discreditable urchin who waits upon you?"

"Regards me as little better than a beggar! Where a half-starved brat sees only an empty larder, he beholds only misery and want. The *chef d'œuvres* you saw just now in my drawing-room, have less intrinsic value in his eyes, than a sirloin of beef in an eating-house window. Bill the sweeper pities me, sir,—pities me as a poor old man, almost as much a pauper as himself!"

"He may some day come into contact with people able to enlighten him," observed Basil, gravely. "May I ask, sir, whether you have any recollection of the book beside you?"

"You got it from your mother!" said Abednego, as if startled into the rejoinder.

"You sold it to her, then?"—demanded Basil, anxious to account for his knowledge of the fact. But at the word, Abednego half started from his chair, as if smitten with a sore and sudden pain. In a moment, however, he recovered himself.

"Nay,—I only so concluded by force of inference," said he. "A taste for the works of Holbein and Hollar, appeared more appropriate to an accomplished woman, than to a gay guardsman. Perhaps you wish to dispose of the book?"

"I am not, thank God, so straitened, even by the imprudences which have rendered me your debtor," said Basil, proudly, "as to be driven to the sale of my mother's property,—or even of property derived from her. I merely wished to account to myself for the inscription for your initials on the title page."

"The initials of A. O. have, I admit, obtained strange notoriety by

my means," said Abednego; "nevertheless you cannot suppose me to be the only individual who bears them, or has ever borne them?"

"Scarcely!" replied young Annesley. "But these letters are distinctly of your own tracing!"

"Are you so expert in handwritings as to swear to that?" demanded Abednego; abstaining, however, from a glance towards the book again officiously placed before him by Basil. "My dear young friend—take my advice, and neither perplex your brains by surmises on subjects that little concern you, nor by inferences arising out of idle coincidences, which the inexperience of boyhood conceives to be pregnant with meaning. You are surprised for instance, that I am tolerably well acquainted with your movements, and the movements of people so much out of my sphere of life as Lord Maitland's wife. A moment's reflection ought to convince you, that a portion of the Money-lender's business is to obtain the most accurate information concerning the spendthrifts of the day,—already his debtors, or his debtors likely to become. I look upon all such as constituting my flocks and herds;—as much my property as the physician regards the gouty lord lolling past him in his chariot; or the undertaker the hectic wretch he hears coughing at the street corner!"

"It may be your business to seek such information: the wonder lies in your obtaining it!"

"All information may be had for money!" rejoined Abednego, rubbing his lean hands with an air of exultation. "Everything is to be had for money—if applied with the same intelligence that gathered it together. Look at me, Mr. Annesley! did you ever see a more loathsome scarecrow?"

And as he spoke the Jew raised from his head the Greek cap, embroidered with tarnished gold lace, by which its bald crown was covered, as if to give greater expansion to his ugliness.

"Ay, smile, sir!—You are too civil to confirm the ungracious verdict of a man who sees himself as he sees all things else in this world—in the clear and searching light of truth! But I tell you that, unsightly as I am, women both young and fair cajole me with their courtesies:—I would say caresses, but that you must be an eye-witness to the fact, to have faith for disproportion so monstrous. Look ye here!—this tawdry thing," said he, pointing to the cap, which he now replaced upon his head, "was worked for me by the white hands of a countess; and if I chose it, she is ready to embroider a dozen such,—nay, to place them with her aristocratic fingers upon the grey head of the old Money-lender!"

"For which subjection to your will, you despise her!" said Basil with indignation.

"I despise her, because the necessities that bring her cringing to my feet, arise from the wantonness of folly,—nay, the wantonness of crime; for, in a wife and mother, folly becomes criminal as vice! This woman must shine, forsooth, and glitter, and dazzle, by the splendor of her entertainments, and fashion of her dress. Why? Because she is proud;—because she has the ambition of being cited for her distinction of looks and manners!—And what is the result of her pride and her distinction? Even that she is made to crawl in all the indigence of extravagance, to the knees of A. O. the Money-lender, and beg him, with tears in her eyes, and prayers upon her lips,—nay, more than prayers, if I were brute enough to profit by her subjection,—to take pity upon her necessities.

"You doubt this?—Read, read! It may be treachery for a lover to exhibit the letters of a fond and trusting woman. It is none for the Money-lender to betray the correspondence of a thrifless customer!"—

And snatching a pen from the old leaden ink-stand beside him, and passing it hastily through the signature of a letter which, while speaking he had taken from an envelope lying on the table, he presented it to Basil. Remark the countess's coronet on the seal," said he, "and admire the handwriting, and elegance of the paper, in confirmation of my assertion, ere you peruse the abject pleadings of this fashionable bankrupt!"

Basil Annesley shuddered as he read; for every line and every syllable adduced horrible confirmation of Abednego's assertions.

"You knew not half the advantages of my calling!" cried the old mad, laughing with feeble triumph at the air of consternation that overspread the countenance of Basil, under the influence of one of those painful discoveries which tend to shake our confidence in human nature. "Till now, you regard the old beggar of Paulet street as the crazy proprietor of a warehousefull of worm-eaten curiosities, left in deposit by his customers,—of a few crazy houses,—and perhaps a few floating thousands lent out on infamous usury. Ha!—ha!—ha!—ha!—You would give worlds, boy,—worlds, for a thousandth part of my influence and authority!—Preferment and promotion lie in the bureau of the Money-lender!—I command most of those who command the destinies of the kingdom. I have princes, ministers, bishops, among my debtors; your highflying orator, your rhapsodizing author;—fellows who, upon the hustings, or in the house or at Exeter Hall, get up and specify upon virtue, honor, honesty; but whose shallow consciences are not the less admeasurable by certain shreds of parchment, called bonds, which I hold in my possession. There are few things they dare refuse me: and even as war-making kings tremble under the governance of Rothschild, under mine,—

under the control of A. O. shivering in his garret,—abide more than one, two, or three of those to whom you uncover your head reverentially as you pass! You saw me keep the Duke of Rochester dancing attendance at my gate. As much, and more, also, have I done to men having the blood-royal of England in their veins!"

The spirits of Basil were overpowered by the vehemence of excitement gradually enkindled in the old man's frame by the progress of discussion. He almost feared that Abednego must be under the influence of fever, to become thus strangely communicative.

"Open yonder bureau," said the Money-lender, extending his skinny finger to one clamped with iron, which stood beside the wretched pallet that formed his comfortless bed.

And Basil almost mechanically obeying, beheld within, in separate compartments, piles of rouleaus, such as he had seen in the secretaire in Greek street, besides a variety of morocco-cases.

"Bring me a handful of those baubles—or stay! you know not the ways of the place," he continued, tottering from his chair, till he stood beside Annesley, leaning on the bureau, of which he opened a secret drawer. "Look here!—these are a duchess's diamonds. I hold them in pledge while she appears at the right hand of the throne in false trinkets of paste! These sapphires are the property of a banker's wife, who pretends to have grown 'serious,' as a pretence for abjuring the use of jewels; because, deceitful jade! her own is in the keeping of A. O.! But this—this is my crown of glory!" chuckled the Money-lender, bringing forth a small round case, containing a bracelet of brilliants?—"Do you see this miniature?—Six years only have elapsed, since the proud and happy young lord it represents, placed it on the arm of his lovely bride! He has been three years in his grave,—and the miniature is mine! The tinsel of fashion by which the widow is trying to bewilder another silly victim into wedlock, is procured with means of my supplying. But she broke the heart of her first husband by her extravagance. It may not be easy to find another ready to be heart-broken."

"Surely you had better rest yourself again, sir, in your easy chair," said Annesley, eager to avoid these hateful revelations. "Pardon me, if I own that I am by no means anxious to see the veil uplifted from the deformities and defeatures of my fellow-creatures."

"I have, nevertheless, too deep a stake in your well-doing, not to afford you the means of discriminating between the sheep of the flock, and the wolves in sheep's clothing," said the Money-lender, as he doubly locked the bureau, and retreated to his seat. "Admit," said he, gathering more closely around him the robing of his furred ymar, which might have served a theatrical Doge of Venice, or Grand Pensionary of Holland,—“admit that, if I choose to deny myself the daintiness of being drugged by a fashionable apothecary, and lawdled over by a canting housekeeper, it is not for want of means to keep such reptiles in my pay?"

"Which makes me only the more regret, sir, your obstinate discomfort," replied Basil, beginning to survey the squalid wretchedness of the millionaire, as the crotchet of a maniac. "You are ill—more ill, perhaps, than you imagine; and left here all night alone, (for even the boy, I conclude, quits you at night?) alone, with the gnawing of the rats for companionship—to fight against fever and suffocation—you may have cause to repent your rejection of the means of care and comfort, secured you by your ample fortune."

"I have been left alone with worse things than gnawing rats—even with my own bitter and gnawing thoughts, and yet struggled through the trial," said Abednego. "You pity me, young man, for asking to be stifled by a quinsy, when I might hire some frowsy old woman to sit up with me, whose gripe upon my throat at midnight were a worse peril than my disease!—Basil! had you ever experienced the heart-choking that suspends the impulses of life, under a sense of the contumely of those you love—had you ever felt the fever that throbs in the burning veins, when disparaged by the idol of your tenderness—the woman for whom you would have periled every hope of your soul, in this world, and the world to come—had you seen the tools, the knaves, whom you despise with the full force of your vigorous intellect—the warm fervor of your generous heart, triumphing over your defeat, and asking how you presume to form pretensions to the smiles of beauty; you—you—with nothing to recommend you at the possession of youth, ardor, mind, cultivation, honor, truth—and treble the earthly enjoyments of the lordly home from which you desire to remove her to the temple of wedded love where you would have served her as a slave;—had you known all this, Basil Annesley—had you felt those contemptuous looks eating like caustic into your flesh—had you heard those insulting words piercing like poison-arrows into the marrow of your bones—you would have been content to live as I do, apart from the titled herd, apart from the rapacious crew, despising alike the hirelings for bread, and the hirelings for vanity;—alone—independent—brooding over the sense of a mighty wrong, and anticipating the triumph of a mighty revenge!"

"All this I could perfectly understand," replied young Annesley, feeling himself against the awe with which he was beginning to listen to what appeared to be the rhapsodies of a lunatic—"provided your privation tended towards the accomplishment of aught beyond your personal inconvenience. But what enemy of yours will be the

worse for your remaining this bitter night destitute of attendance and medicaments?"

"They will be the worse for the results of a system of which these hardships form a part!" replied Abednego, in a gruffer voice, as if exhausted by his recent outburst. "I discern, by the growing superiority of your glance, young man, the contempt kindling in your soul towards my short-sightedness!—You recall to yourself the words of the Psalmist—'He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them!' I know—I know, Basil Annesley—and I glory in knowing! He who gathers them will shed coals of fire upon those who—But no matter! What care *you* for the burning injuries or burning revenge of the old Money-lender?"

"I shall care much more, sir, to know that you are lying here devoid of the necessities of life, while *my* pillow has been smoothed by your kindness," replied Basil mildly; "but I cannot offer you my aid. I cannot *now* ask you to accept the services of a faithful servant of my own; because, in the instance of others, you have shown me that you consider such acts of kindness to be interested and mercenary."

"Not from one so young and guileless as *you*!" burst in a hoarse murmur from the parched lips of Abednego. "Be satisfied!—It would make me far more uncomfortable to have my poor old dwelling ransacked by the curiosity of strangers, than to lie here conscious that the javelin of death is at my breast, and that there is none to close my eyes if the grim One gets the best of it!—I want no prying Jacks to spy out the nakedness of the land, or into its abundance; to exult over my empty cellar, or covet my brimming coffers. There is less peril, Basil Annesley, in the quinsy which, as you perceive, is gradually thickening my voice and filming my eyes, than in the malice of the cut-throats with whom your rascal in livery might league himself, on the temptation of the wealth that lies ensconced in this old seeming rat-hole, richer of contents than the palace of Aladdin!—But you pretend a desire to do me service?" said he, half-interrogatively.

Annesley answered not a word; and the Money-lender was forced to reiterate his question.

"I pretend nothing," replied Basil, coldly.—"I pity your infatuation—I pity your abandonment;—and would fain induce you to take pity on yourself!"

"I repeat that you just now tendered me offers of service. If sincere, and your good will be not a mere pretence, confer an obligation on me by giving me this volume!" said Abednego, striking his bony hand on the copy of Hollar lying on the table.

"I cannot do that!" replied Basil, in a decided tone; "for it is not mine to give. It is the property of my mother!"

The piercing glance of Abednego peered from under his bushy eyebrows, and fixed itself scrutinizingly on his face.

"How comes it, then, in your possession?" said he.

"I arrived yesterday morning from Barlingham Grange, where she resides," replied Annesley, firmly, "and brought it with me"—

"Without her knowledge?"—

"Without her knowledge!" replied the young man, in a less assured voice. But the admission appeared less to provoke the contempt than the satisfaction of his singular companion. A ray of joy twinkled in his deep-set eyes.

"And what *tempted* you to bring it with you?" inquired Abednego, with persevering curiosity.

"I wished to show it to a friend, to whom, as a curious work of art, I thought the sight might be advantageous," replied the harassed guest.

"That is, you wanted to conciliate the blind old father of Esther Verelst!"—added the Money-lender, while the color mounted to the temples of the astonished Basil.

"Do you mean me to believe you in league with Satan, as well as the comptroller of half the destinies of London?"—cried he, losing all self-possession.

Abednego laughed aloud at this apostrophe; and the huskiness of his voice was now painful to hear.

"You go far out of your way, young sir," said he, "to account for my participation in the household secrets of a needy artist!—Is it so *very* marvellous that I—A. O. the Money-lender—should be aware that the sum of money you raised so rashly at my hands, was devoted to meet acceptances which had their origin in the embarrassments of that wrong-headed ass—Verelst the painter!"

Basil Annesley now fairly started from his seat.

"Somewhat an onerous requital," persisted Abednego, with a sneer, "for a few cups of linden-water, bestowed upon you during your illness at Heidelberg, and a few lessons in crayons!"

"Mr. Osalez,"—Basil was beginning,—but Abednego persevered in a louder key—

"You fancy," he continued, "that it would go to the stubborn heart of Lady Annesley, to know that a book of hers had fallen into the hands of an obscure, money-lending, miserly, contemned, and outcast Jew!—But I tell you, young gentleman, that, haughty as she is, her blood would rise to fever-heat, did she know that her only son—the son of her pride, if not of her affections—had pledged his heart, and meditated pledging his hand, to the daughter of a starving

artist, and the granddaughter of—But no matter! Her scorn and her humiliation are no affair of mine!—But here comes my brew of diet-drink!" cried he, as the dirty urchin, carrying a jug of hot water, peeped into the room; "and the more welcome, that my throat is parched with talking. So no more to-day, Mr. Annesley! Untempting as my bed may look to you, I am cowardly enough to feel that my old bones will be the better for it. Farewell! If you have consistency enough, to care two days hence for the ailment that paints such compassion in your looks at this moment, pr'ythee come and see whether death or A. O. have fought the better fight! Till then, surely, you will entrust to my hands a volume so replete with instruction as this?" said he, again laying his hand upon the book, which Annesley had no pretext for refusing as a loan. And almost before he knew what he was about, he had been unconsciously dismissed by the Money-lender; and was standing on the pavement of Delahaye Street, listening to the bolting, and barring, and putting up of the rusty chain within, by Bill the sweeper.

Basil had not resisted Abednego's commands, that the boy should follow him down to open the door; for he thus secured an opportunity to enforce, by a second bribe, his charge to the uncouth page on no account to leave the invalid that night; but to be in readiness to receive the medicines and instructions he was proceeding to despatch from the nearest chemists's, for the alleviation of the alarming malady of A. O.

CHAPTER IX.

NEVER had Basil Annesley installed himself before the fire of his lodgings in so desponding a mood as after his interview with Abednego. Not a single point or person whereon he could fix his thoughts with complacency, by way of relief! After a visit to his mother, in which he had been made to feel himself an unwelcome guest, after becoming an ear-witness to the ravings of the old gardener, which he would have given worlds to efface from his memory, he had been spurned from the door which he had a right to approach as a benefactor, and where he would nevertheless have been proud to kneel in all the self-sacrificing humility of love!

His mother, he knew to be exposed to the most harassing and painful duties. The family of Verelst appeared to be distracted by some peculiar contrariety of fortune, of which he was unable to surmise the origin. And now, his benefactor, the man for whom, involuntarily, he entertained at once the greatest interest and greatest contempt, was suffering from a dangerous disease. In neither of the three cases could he exercise a beneficial influence. Gladly would he have dedicated all the means at his command, to alleviate the pangs of any of the three. But he was powerless as a child. All he could do was to sympathize in silence, and at a distance.

To say that no floating visions mingled with his many vexations, would be disingenuous. In the depths of his reverie, poor Basil seemed to behold passing before him, as in a dream, all that was occurring at Barlingham—all that was ehancing in the drawing-room of Verelst—all that was exercising a fatal empire in the miserable attic of A. O.

So irritated was his mind by these perplexities, that he felt unequal to the exertion of dining at mess; and he accordingly determined to take an early dinner at the Clarendon, and proceed to the play; the resource of homeless men in London against the publicity of their Club, or loneliness of their lodgings.

Now the play, in the month of January, is as habitual a resort of fashionable loungers as it is secure from their presence the moment the season commences. Scarcely had Basil taken a back seat in one of the public boxes, leaning back with folded arms, for the unmolested enjoyment of his reflections, when an unusual degree of movement and conversation in one of the private boxes attracted his notice, and he perceived that it was tenanted by a party of his brother officers—Loftus, Blencowe, and Maitland, the old boy Carrington, and the young boy Wilberton—precisely those whom others would have designated as his "friends." This was vexatious; for Loftus had invited him to dine with them and join a party to the Adelphi, and they would now perceive that the engagement he had pleaded, was a mere subterfuge to avoid them; for he rightly conjectured that the unusual vociferation in their box was produced by their discovery of his entrance, and ejaculations of indignation at his desertion.

He was consequently as little at his ease at the theatre, as he would have been at home. To his disturbed thoughts, the eyes of the merry party seemed to be constantly upon him. He fancied them still pursuing the system of quizzing which had irritated him the preceding night into an unlucky explanation, the full force of embarrassments arising from which had been demonstrated to him by the officiousness of Carrington, on his way from Arlington Street to the Club.

It was, perhaps, because annoyed by the sort of inquisition to which he felt himself exposed—for the laughs had the advantage over him in point both of position and numbers—that, the moment the curtain dropped upon a tragedy composed of glazed calico, gilt paper, glass beads, cotton velvet, twelve flourishes of trumpets, a voice more uproarious in offering "a kingdom for a horse" than all the twelve put together, and a prompter still louder and more active

than both the trumpets and tragedian, Basil quitted the theatre. He foresaw that the significant smiles and whisperings they had directed towards him during the courtship of Lady Anne and the mild heroism of Richmond, would have double scope during the tumults of the pantomime.

It was a chilly night. The moonlight lay like snow upon the frozen pavement; and that vivid brightness, which in summer seems intended to facilitate happier enjoyment than the glare of day, either for the revellers of this world, or those which, unseen and unsuspected, disport themselves impalpably around us, seemed lost and thrown away on a state of atmosphere that drove both man and beast to shelter. There was nothing to tempt forth fay or fairy—the sylph to the moonbeam, the undine to the wave. A few shivering mortals crept along the streets despairing—or by a brisker encounter with the cold, attempted to lessen the evil; and it was impossible to connect the idea of that frozen moonlight with anything but suffering and discontent.

Even the young blood of Basil was chilled within him; and though, in the course of his musings during the tragedy, he had made up his mind to proceed to Westminster and ascertain that the man whose eccentricities had so enthralled his attention was not wholly without assistance on such a night, yet on emerging from the heated theatre into the frosty atmosphere without, his courage almost failed him.

As he issued from the public door in Bow Street adjoining the private one, a tiger in livery, with a cockade in his hat, touched it to him, and ran to resume his place in the cabriolet he had abandoned to the care of a brother atom in order to gossip with the footmen in the entry. His attention attracted by this irregularity, Basil perceived that two of the cabs in waiting were those of John Maitland and Blencowe, both of which were always at his orders; and aware that neither of them would be in request for two hours to come, he jumped into that of the latter, and having hurried as far as the entrance of Delahaye Street, desired the lad to drive back to the theatre, and await his master—to whom he was to explain the occurrence. Thus secured from a chilly walk, Basil proceeded, on the opposite side of the pavement, to the house occupied by Abednego; and raised his eyes anxiously towards the attic story.

Not a gleam of light in the windows—not a token of habitation. The old man might have been left alone and fireless, to wrestle with his disease; nay, he might have sunk under it, united with the inclemency of the weather. It was just possible that the room occupied by the Money-lender might not face the street—for Annesley had taken no note in the morning of its look out; but if not, the idea of an old man in a high fever, half suffocated with a quinsy, (a disease of all others demanding the watchfulness of an attendant,) exposed to the chill of that deserted rat-hole, was indeed a picture of desolation.

In spite of the cold, he stood for some minutes wrapt in his cloak, contemplating the quaint old mansion. Then, as if conscious of the absurdity of interfering in the domestic affairs of one to whom he bore so little affinity, and who would probably resent his kindness as importunate or artful, he walked away as far as the corner of the street, on his road homeward. Again, however, his steps were arrested by a sense of the isolated wretchedness of A. O.!

"If the old creature should die in the night for want of aid!" murmured he; and, at the supposition, back he hastened to the house, and stepping down to the door, rang gently at the bell.

Basil was prepared to allow the greatest possible latitude for the deliberation of the little sweeper, to whom, in sending the medicines from the chemist's, he had addressed a message, promising a reward on the morrow, if he adhered to his promise of not quitting the house. He therefore waited quietly at the door, till he conceived the poor urchin had found time to shuffle up stairs from the heap of shavings in the front kitchen, on which he had promised Basil to pass the night, visiting, from time to time, the chamber-door of the invalid. But when five minutes had elapsed, Basil rang again; at the end of ten a third time. Still, no answer!

Weary of standing in the cold, he began to exercise his personal observations by examining carefully through the area-railings whether light were perceptible through the cracks of the shutters; the kitchen, in which Bill had promised to station himself, bearing evidence in the name of "front" of being overlooked by the street. But the most careful eye could detect no straggling gleam betokening habitation.

"Perhaps the poor boy may have fallen asleep in the cold?" mused Basil, drawing his cloak closer about his ears. "If I were to try and wake him? A stone thrown against the shutter, perhaps, might rouse him up!"

But where was a stone to be found on the frozen pavement of Delahaye Street? Though St. James's Park, and all its gravel, lay within distance of a stone's throw, Basil might as well have required an "entire and perfect chrysolite" to fling at the shutter, as a single pebble! After a moment's deliberation, he whistled loudly, in hopes that if dozing, this signal might reach the ear of the boy.

In an instant, an answering whistle sounded shrilly from the opposite side of the street, and a rough hand was placed upon his collar. Basil started round to grapple with his antagonist, but stopped short on noticing the dress of a policeman! Ere he had time for explana-

tion, two more ran up to the assistance of the first.

"Hold fast, Bill!" cried one of the new comers, panting for breath.

"I've been watchin' on him this quarter of a hour," cried the original captor—"seeing as he'd a heye to the parlor winders o' the old Jew. He's been trying skeleton-keys, and what not, at the door. S'pose we gives the alarm indoors? From his piping up, the chap has may be got accomplices within?"

"Ay, ay;—a put-up robbery!"

"Jist the flash-cut iv a Wist-ind burglar!" cried the third policeman; all three keeping such a fast hold of the collar of Basil, as to leave him scarcely breath for explanations, which, even when made, were utterly disregarded.

"A mighty likely story!" exclaimed the constable from Great George street, who had now come up, in answer to the summons of his subs. "Gentlemen who come to inquire after the health of other gentlemen do not whistle to the foomau down the ary!"

"Nor try skilton-kays at the front doore!"—added the third policeman

"Besides, the old fellow at this 'ere 'ouse hav'nt e'er a friend as ever any body hear tell of," observed the original captor;—"and from his anxiousness to have his house watched, I've a notion there's property past common inside."—

"In that case, knock at the door, and give an alarm to have the house searched," said the constable,—"B. 947, will assist in carrying the fellow to the station-house."

"No assistance will be required,—I am quite willing to proceed there," said Annesley, perfectly composed. "But before I go, I should be glad to learn news of the old gentlemen who resides here, who is dangerously ill."

The men, who were holding him as tightly as though Jerry Abershaw or Dick Turpin were in their clutches, now inquired, with expressive gestures, whether he saw any green in their eyes: to which inquiry, Basil replying by an eager renewal of his request addressed to the constable, B. 947, who, apparently less experienced in his calling than the rest, suggested that "no great 'arm ud' done by keeping him fast till the door uppened."

"Do you suppose, sir, that I require to be obstructed in my dooty by the likes of *you*?" cried the indignant constable.—"I'm anserable to my super'ors, and that's enough. Carry him off!"—said he, addressing the "infer'ors" with the dignity of a Dogberry—"I'll be after you in a jiffy."

Annesley was accordingly compelled to hurry off between the two policemen, without waiting to hear the result of the alarm at the door of A. O. He offered no resistance,—concluding that his explanations at the station-house would produce his immediate release; and was only vexed to perceive, on entering the crowded room, that from the number of charges claiming priority, he should be some time detained.—It was no such pleasant sight to contemplate the number of wretches taken insensible from the door-steps of gin shops; or, though it still wanted an hour of midnight,—the set of miserable beings,—more miserable from being less insensible, apprehended as wandering homeless in the streets at that inclement season. Basil Annesley was far from needing Shakespeare's admonishment—

Take physic, Pomp!—

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

in order to waken his sensibility to the wants of his fellow creatures: still, till that night, he had been scarcely aware of the nature and amount of wretchedness infesting the streets of the Great Babylon.

At length, his turn arrived; and he was beginning to launch forth into a simple narrative of what had befallen him, when he was authoritatively desired to hold his tongue; and the depositions of the police assumed their due precedence.

Let those who, after listening in either House to a dull debate, consisting of incoherent nothings, hemmed and hawed by one honorable member,—mumbled by a second,—mouthed by a third,—and executed in dumb show by the hands and lips of a fourth, (inaudible in the gallery,)—peruse with wondering eyes on the following morning in the flowing periods of *The Times*, a concentration of the wisdom of Parliament, arranged under the several heads of "The Duke of —;" "The Marquis of —;" "The Honorable Member for Finbury," or the honorable memble member for no matter what; as a fair and true representation of the bald chat of the preceding night,—conjecture the amazement of Basil on hearing a most consistent and plausible narrative of his exploits as a burglar!—His face was recognised by several present as familiar at Marlborough street; and one more general of information than the rest, facetiously reminded him of his two months at "the Mill!"

It was rather a relief than a vexation when an examination of his person was ordered, preparatory to his being locked up for the night;—knowing that, instead of the skeleton keys and jemmy imputed to him, the property in his greatcoat pockets would confirm the identity he had asserted. When, however, the initials on his handkerchief, and the name inscribed in a pocket book containing his letters and memoranda, had sufficed, as he fondly imagined, to prove the delinquent of Brixton Mill to be an officer of the Guards, of honorable reputation, and he was anticipating apologies from the Inspector, new

grounds of suspicion presented themselves. The fellow who taxed his face with having been "up a matter o' twenty times at Mobbro' street," suggested that the "soortoo might have been prigged" from the rightful owner, and worn with all his property, in order to establish an alias for the thief!

"If you will send a messenger to the Guards' Club, and request Captain Blencowe, whose cab is waiting there, either to drive hither and identify me, or despatch one of my brother officers for that purpose, or even his own servant who accompanied me an hour ago to Delahaye street, you will perceive that these men have deposed falsely, or rather to thrice as much as the truth!"—said Basil, in a tone that startled the benumbed faculties of the stultified Inspector; and after some further discussion among the deponents, he was locked up to abide the result of the message.

Three quarters of an hour did poor Annesley await the return of the policeman despatched to St. James's street; in a room reeking with the vapors of gin and tobacco, emitted by three ragged human beings who lay huddled together, two upon a flock bed in the corner of the strong room; the third upon the floor, and breathing so hard and irregularly, as to betoken an apoplectic seizure rather than mere drunkenness. It was in vain he remonstrated against being placed in collision with these outcasts. The charge of false witnessing he had made against the police force, exposed him to the utmost rigor of what is called the Law.

At length, when heated and chafed almost to frenzy by this untimely incarceration and revolting companionship, the grating lock intimated that his probation was at an end; and he was summoned back into the police room,—now hotter than ever, and crowded with new committals.

The first objects that struck him, (their Chesterfield wrappers and laughing faces affording a singular contrast to the uniforms of the policemen and filthy tatters of the prisoners,) were Maitland and Wilberton, arm in arm, who, having issued from the suppertable into the frosty air on Annesley's summons, were just sufficiently affected by the cigars and brandy and water they had taken at starting, to enjoy beyond measure the part they proposed to play. Though satisfied by Basil's message of the nature of his scrape, they pretended, on reaching the station house, to believe themselves summoned at the impudent instigation of an imposter; and the consequence was that, on emerging from the lock up room, the prisoner found himself treated quite as cavalierly as before.

"Never saw the fellow in my lie!" stammered Wilberton, who, more elated than his companion, was delighted at the prospect of the spree proposed by John Maitland, by way of retaliation on Basil's pretended engagement. "Some drunken dog of—of a pickpocket,—who has made fr—free with our name!"—

"It is deuced hard that a gentleman should be disturbed from his supper on such absurd pretences!" added Maitland, assuming an air of drunken indignation.—And Annesley was about to be removed to a cell for the remainder of the night, when something in the rollicking air and exulting tone of the two witnesses, so far attracted the notice of the experienced Inspector, that when Basil, appealing to him in the gentlemanly tone which rarely fails of effect, entreated that the servant or servants who had driven down with the two gentlemen to the Station might be called in, he readily complied. But before Maitland's tiger had time to make his appearance, whose testimony must put an end to the mystery, his master had begun to address Annesley by the name of "old fellow!" and to treat the matter as a joke.

The result was the instant release of the supposed burglar. Nothing had been found upon him confirmatory of the deposition of B. 947, who had already sneaked off in anticipation of being given in charge in his turn;—and by way of conciliating the ex-prisoner, who, ere he followed his jocose friends out of the station-house, intimated his intention of lodging a complaint with the magistrates on the morrow, the Inspector acquainted him that, unable to obtain ingress to the house in Delahaye street, and seriously alarmed for the safety of its inmate, the policemen had attempted to force the door,—the noise of which brought down the old man from his attic, pistols in hand, to certify his own safety.

"Nevertheless," added the Inspector, "the constable, who persuaded him to a parley with the chain up, states that the old gentleman was in such a state of debility that his voice was scarcely audible;—which account, sir, ought certainly to have induced more belief than I accorded to the motive induced for visiting him at so strange an hour."

On his release from the tyranny of the police, Basil determined to return instantly to Delahaye street; being now certain that the little sweeper had proved false to his charge, and that the miserable old man was left alone.

Just as he was quitting the door of the station-house, resisting the officious offers of a raggamuffin loitering near the door to run and fetch him a cab,—a strange figure appeared at the corner of the street; which, but for its venturing so near the head-quarters of the law, might easily have been mistaken for one of the calling to which Basil had just escaped the imputation of belonging. But the moon shone too brightly through the clear atmosphere, to admit of any de

ception in the eyes of Annesley; who instantly discerned in that unsightly form, the individual to whose aid he was hastening, as perhaps on a bed of death!

"What, in God's name, sir, has tempted you out in your present state on such a night!"—cried Basil, eagerly accosting him.

But the answer was wholly unintelligible. Abednego leaned heavily against the area railings of an adjoining house, as if overcome by his feelings or his infirmities, and groaned aloud.

"Fetch a coach!" cried Basil to the fellow who had been importuning him,—perceiving that, short as was the distance to Delahaye street, there was much doubt whether the strength of the sick man would enable him to retrace his steps;—and while listening to the broken gasps, half invective, half endearment, in which Abednego attempted to express anger at his young friend's officiousness, and indignation at the dilemma into which it had betrayed him, a vehicle rattled up;—and the manner in which the invalid, after being lifted in, sunk breathless into a corner, convinced Basil Annesley that his previous anxieties were not exaggerated.

"It is as much as his life is worth to have encountered the night air on such a night!" burst involuntarily from his lips, as he compared the warm interest entertained in his behalf by the eccentric old Jew, with the desertion of his gay associates;—and a hoarse ejaculation of "my life!" which escaped the lips of his companion, was the only intelligible sound that reached the ear of Basil till they stopped before the door in Delahaye street.

"You must allow me to assist you up stairs," said Basil, as the coachman held open the coach door, and Abednego taking a pass-key from his waistcoat pocket, prepared to open his own.—

"No, no!" muttered the old man,—*"I tell you no!—Who is to put the chain up after you, when you quit the house?"*—

But the effort he had made for this explanation proved too much for him; and on reaching his door, he tottered and would have fallen, while attempting to place the key in the lock, had not Annesley started forward and supported him in his arms. A low moaning now escaped his lips; and Annesley having taken the key from his icy hand, and pushed open with his foot the slowly yielded door, carried him into the hall, and placed him on a bench.—After returning to pay and dismiss the coachman, he carefully closed the street door; and even so far conceded to the habits of Abednego as to bar it and put up the chain, ere he snatched with one hand the filthy iron lamp which the Jew had left burning on the pavement of the hall, on his departure for the station-house, and offered his arm to A. O., who was gradually reviving.

"Let me see you up stairs, sir," said Basil. "It is useless declining my assistance. The night is half over, and since I know you to be alone in the house, I swear to you that I will not quit it before morning!"

The suffering man seemed fully aware of his incompetency under the influence of growing indisposition to dispute the point with his young companion; for, instead of offering further resistance, he accepted the proffered arm of Basil, and attempted to ascend the stairs. The task, however, was by no means easy. His respiration was all but impeded by the increased swelling and inflammation of his throat: and on attaining the second landing, he clung with both hands to the arm of Annesley, and panted for breath.

It was not till after the laps of some minutes that they were able to attain the attic, the door of which was locked,—from habit more than as a security, since there was no other human being in the house.

They entered the room. Basil saw with concern that there was not a vestige of fire; and that his suffering companion had risen from his miserable bed to answer the summons of the police. From the iron lamp he carried, young Annesley hastily lighted a candle that stood on the table, which, in strange contradiction to the habits of Abednego, proved to be of wax.

"Give me the lamp!" faltered the old man, rising from the *bergere* into which he had sunk exhausted on entering. "I have wood and shavings in the other room. Since you choose to abide with me, I suppose I must kindle a fire."

"Not on my account, sir!" said Basil, eagerly; but on reflecting that the sentiment of hospitality might be the only means of inducing the old gentleman to bestow upon himself a necessary indulgence, he desisted: and Abednego tottered, grumbling, into the adjoining chamber. Thus left alone, on casting his eyes around him upon that wretched room, as much a place of penance as the police cell he had quitted, Basil noticed that, on a low table beside the flock bed, lay the book borrowed that morning by his host,—and beside it, a large crucifix of Berlin iron,—and a folded paper!—A CRUCIFIX!—The world then, and his own suspicions, had decided wrongfully?—Abednego the Money-lender was only in name and practices a Jew!

While pondering upon this startling discovery, a heavy fall in the adjoining closet attracted Basil's attention; and though believing it to proceed only from a log of the wood mentioned by his singular host he hurried to his assistance. Either A. O. had entangled his feet in the long wrapper in which he had enveloped himself to confront the night air, or had fallen from weakness;—for there he lay, stretched upon the heap of mingled coals, cinders, and fragments of old wood, that encumbered one corner of the room!

The old man had struck himself too in the fall; for on lifting him up, Basil perceived, by the light of the lamp, (which, though overturned on the floor, was not extinguished,) that blood was gushing from his lips.—Lifting him hastily in his arms, he bore him like a child into the adjoining attic, and placed him on the bed;—Abednego groaning heavily at intervals,—either from illness, or the disastrous effects of his accident.

His host thus manifestly disabled, Basil felt entitled to bestir himself according to his own inventions. He was there alone, in the dead of the night, without aid or comfort, in sole charge of a sick or dying man. It was no moment for scruples or nicety. Throwing off his great coat, and hastily gathering from the heap in the adjoining room materials for a fire, he soon produced a blaze in the rusty old grate, which diffused some degree of cheerfulness, and promised gradually to diffuse warmth through the desolate apartment. An old kettle stood within the fender; but as it proved empty, Basil proceeded to a stone water jug that stood in the corner of the room to replenish it. The water in the pitcher was frozen!—In order to break the ice, which resisted his hand, Basil took up a faggot stick lying near it on the floor. The crash caused by the fracture seemed to rouse the faculties of Abednego, who instantly woke as from a support.

"What mischief are you doing there?" gasped he, evidently only partially sensible. "What have you broken?—I have not kept a piece of crockery entire since you began to wait upon me!—And how dare you light that monstrous fire?—Fool!—what have I to roast here besides your own wretched limbs, that you thus waste my fuel?"

From the little Basil Annesley could gather of this apostrophe, uttered in a hoarse whisper, he saw that Abednego's head was wandering with fever, and that he mistook him for the little sweeper.

Without attempting to undeceive him, he persisted in his self-imposed task;—filled the kettle, set it on the fire, and having found untouched the packet of dried lime flowers he had despatched from the chemist's for an infusion, prepared a drink for the sick man, such as he remembered to have been administered to himself at Heidelberg, by the mother of Esther.

There was some difficulty in finding a cup in which to offer it to Abednego. As a last resource, Basil took from a shelf behind him what appeared to be a bronze ornament, which afterwards proved to be an antique silver goblet, a *chef d'œuvre* of one of the old chasers of Lombardy!

The invalid drank and seemed comforted. His moans became less heavy. After a time he opened his eyes, and breathed as though the oppression of his chest were in some degree relieved. By degrees, and before he altogether regained his consciousness, Basil removed his outer garments, and having placed them under his pillow as a prop to his head, covered him closely up with the quilt of his wretched pallet. With a second cup of the hot infusion, he now mixed some antimony as prescribed by the chemist he had consulted; and the invalid having again, almost mechanically, swallowed the soothing infusion, Basil left it to exercise its effect, and, wearied by his unaccustomed exertions, flung himself into the old *bergere* before the fireplace for rest and reflection.

The strangeness of his own situation afforded, of course, the first subject of his cogitations! There was *he*, who indignantly rebutted as an imputation, the charge of intimacy with A. O., brought against him at Lady Maitland's by Blencowe and his set,—actually established as sick nurse beside his bed, in a filthy garret;—performing for him menial offices which he would have hesitated to execute for persons having claims upon his kindness!

Only a few nights before, his mother had refused to accept offices far less humiliating from him, in behalf of an old and faithful servant; and now, he was attending, sole servitor, on the dying bed of a stranger,—whose very existence, a little month before, had been utterly unknown to him!

But the strangest of all these incongruities was, that for the life and soul of him, he could not bring himself to regard Abednego Osalez as a stranger! Some mysterious tie appeared to unite them.—Though the common but most holy tie of fellow-creatureship, including even the Money-lender under the Biblical designation of "neighbor," ought to have sufficed as a motive for the exertions of the young Samaritan, so as to need no further adducement, Basil Annesley, as he contemplated the smoky fireplace, did not conceal from himself that he felt as if seated beside the hearth of one with whom he had been long accustomed to break bread, and take counsel. And yet, the man who lay breathing heavy and unconscious on that wretched pallet, was one whose vocation and habits were hateful to the generous mind of the young soldier! Though the vigorous language and force of intellect of Abednego had invested the calling of the Money-lender with a new character in the eyes of Basil,—though the keenness of his soul and greatness of his speculations had interposed a sort of veil over the littleness of his daily doings, and the detestable nature of his usury,—young Annesley did not attempt to disguise from himself that the man who contemplated with such far-sighted philosophy the value and social influence of money, was in practice a pettifogging miser!—Still, with all the inconsistency and odiousness

of his pursuits, Basil was conscious of involuntary deference towards the proprietor of that filthy garret!—

"The power of thought,—the magic of the mind,"

the energy of soul of one so immeasurably superior to his own position, and so strangely master of the destinies of others, threw a sort of halo round the gloom of the place. It was such wilful, wayward, self-denying misery!—There was such a force of will, such a consternation of self-infliction in the privations of the starving *millionaire*,—that he felt as if contemplating De Rance in the cells of La Trappe, or Charles V. in those of St. Quentin, rather than a vulgar miser undergoing his wilful Prometheism? While gazing on those denuded walls, if it were possible to abhor, it was not easy to despise the inmate of that iron chest of unavailing treasure!

His greatest source of annoyance, now that he was satisfied of having afforded the best succor in his power to the physical ailments of the sick man, arose from the certainty of having exposed himself to the unsparing raillery of his brother officers. Devoid as they were of entertainment at that season of the year, they would not fail to discuss among themselves his solitary visit to the theatre, after the pretext of an engagement; his having driven in Blencowe's cab to what would otherwise have passed for some rendezvous, but what was now discovered to be a midnight visit to A. O.;—a visit, moreover, so unauthorised, as to have caused him to be taken up as a burglar, and exposed him to the chance of a night in the station house!

It was not to be expected that such men as Wilberton and Maitland would deal leniently with these discoveries; and old Carrington was now too stale as a butt, not to impart due value to an adventure which exposed young Annesley for ever and a day to the bantering of those who had already so moved his choler by qualifying him as the arm-in-arm companion of the Money-lender!—

In order to escape the annoyance of his anticipations on this provoking subject, Basil proceeded to take from the table, the only book that naked room afforded for his amusement:—even the volume of *Hollar* which Abednego had so strangely chosen as the consolation of his hours of sickness! As he removed it stealthily from the table, in order not to waken the sick man from his unquiet slumbers, he inadvertently brushed down the paper lying beside it, and stooped to restore it to the table. In the displacement something fell out. On searching upon the floor, it proved to be a lock of hair;—a long, long tress, coil within coil,—which it was impossible not to recognise as that of a woman,—and difficult not to surmise as that of a woman young and lovely:—so silken was its texture,—so rich its hue!

Without the smallest intention of prying into the household secrets of his host, Basil could not replace it in the paper without discerning this. He even noticed the peculiar color of the hair. It was a rare tint; yet long familiar to his eyes as that of a tress, all but similar, which he carried in his pocket book, and which had been recently unfolded before him during the insolent examination at the police office:—his mother's hair!—not silvered as now by the hand of time and influence of care;—but rich and glossy as during her sunny youth.—Basil regarded this lock, which he had obtained as a gift from Dorcas without his mother's knowledge, as the most precious treasure in his possession.

Irresistibly impelled to compare it with the tress he had now discovered in the possession of the Money-lender, he drew forth his pocket-book, abstracted it from the paper, and placed them side by side.—Not the variation of a hair in the length,—not the difference of a shade in their hue!—They were one and the same!—The most indifferent observer would have decided, as Basil was for a moment inclined to decide, that they had been shred from the same beloved head!

But could this be?—What analogy,—what connection could exist, or could ever have existed, between them?—The Money-lender of Greek street, Soho, and the widow of Sir Bernard Annesley!—The haughty daughter of the proudest of ambassadors,—Lord L.—, and the thrifty, artful usurer,—the degraded,—the notorious,—the infamous, A. O.!

CHAPTER X.

SCARCELY less sad than the scene in which young Annesley was officiating, was the one in which, at the same moment, his mother was acting a part equally humane, in her dreary abode at Barlingham Grange.

The old gardner was no more. The burst of feeling of which Basil had been a spectator, proved to have been the last effort of expiring nature; and it was the lady to whom from her childhood he had been devoted, who closed the glassy eyes of the old man, and placed the watch-lights beside the dead. Lady Annesley was, perhaps, the inmate of the Grange best qualified for that solemn duty. Her mind, rendered stern by habitual contact with care, was now of a consistency to encounter without trembling all or any of those earnest duties of life, from which the gentle hearts and hands of her sex shrink with terror, before either the one or the other have been wrung under the influence of anguish or remorse!

Like one moving in her sleep, she has breathed in the ears of old Nicholas the prayers appointed by the Church for a dying bed; and in this effort were perhaps instigated by reluctance to expose the

revelations of his infirm intellect to the ears of a stranger, it was no such apprehension that induced her to assist the sobbing Dorcas in straightening his limbs for the grave, ere consigned by the proper attendants to his last home. Once placed in his coffin, she quitted the room;—quitted it with a heavy sigh,—an in-breathed prayer!—Early sorrows had been bitterly renewed by her trying attendance on the old man, who had unconsciously wounded her to the quick by his incoherent ravings;—and above all, by the hazard to which they had exposed her of betrayal to the child of her heart. But he was now at rest. Both had done their duty. The gray-headed man was released from his earthly penance;—it was she alone who remained to suffer and to atone!

Every person whose feelings have been excited by the performance of some severe and engrossing duty, must have been conscious of a strange vacuity of feeling when the influence of that painful tension is at an end. Like a sufferer whose infirm or shattered limb has been removed by the surgeon, undefinable sensations of uneasiness seem to possess its vacant place. So harassed had been Lady Annesley during the continuance of the gardner's illness, and the perpetual hazards to which it exposed her, that, on the afternoon of the day in which he was laid in the grave, when the old house was restored to its usual mournful quietude, and the two women in their mourning suits kept moving silently and sadly about her, she could not settle to her customary occupations. Involuntarily, she re-entered the room which had been appropriated to the use of the deceased;—the threshold of which she had never crossed of late save under the influence of awe and remorse. All was restored to its usual form. The winter sun was shining through the open casement; and driven back by the piercing atmosphere thus admitted, she had no resource but her own warm sitting-room, and the solace of her books and desk.

Nothing more common than for people of the world, on hearing some compulsory recluse complain of the cheerlessness of solitude, to exclaim,—“But why not read to amuse yourself?” in pursuance of the common-place encomiums of “the sunshine of the mind produced by study,” which our copy-book morality inflicts upon the use of schools. But the notion of reading for amusement, entertained by such people, consists in a first-class subscription to a fashionable library, ensuring the earliest perusal of popular works,—new novels, brilliant periodicals,—holding up to the eye, as in a mirror, a reflection of the progress of civilization, and a picture of the manners and prosperities of the day.

Lady Annesley's book-case, on the contrary, contained only old editions of the works of past centuries; philosophy rendered obsolete by modern improvement; and theology purporting to split so fine the straws of doctrinal casuistry, as to reduce them to chaff. The few sterling books she possessed, the bosom comforters to which we turn in sickness and sorrow, had been her sole companions for twenty lonely years; and with all one's partiality for a favorite writer, it is not more impossible for the dried leaves of the rose to retain the hue and fragrance of the living flower, than for the hundredth perusal to yield the charm of the first. It may indeed, perhaps, when voluntarily culled from the shelves of a voluminous library. But it is only the uninformed and unimaginative mind of the peasant that can derive amusement, Sunday after Sunday, throughout a long life, from his solitary volume of the “*Pilgrim's Progress*.”

Lady Annesley had been more than once forced to admit to herself, that her little library had ceased to charm; and if she pined after anything in her seclusion, it was for the charm of new books to create a new order of ideas, or a happier combination of the old.—But on that cheerless afternoon, she felt as if those ancient companions of her sorrow might perhaps renew their charm; and in accordance with the promptings of the solemn scene of the morning, in the little village church wherein she had seen ashes reconsigned to ashes, and dust to dust, she proceeded to her book-shelf to take down her favorite *Holbein*, with its well-remembered philosophical interleavings.—It was gone!—The book was included in a set of six volumes of favorite works—The *Essays of Montaigne*, and *George Herbert's Manual*—all in the same antique building. Of these, five alone remained;—the copy of *Hollar* was no longer there!

Lady Annesley felt surprised and angry. So undisturbed was the tenor of her life, that no person but herself and her two waiting-women ever crossed the threshold of that chamber; of whom, Hannah could not read or write, while Dorcas was one of those fortunate individuals who find better companionship in the seam they are sewing, than the choicest *chef-d'œuvre* of genius.—Still, either the one or the other might have been tempted by the striking designs of the book, to remove it from the room for more leisurely inspection. She rang and inquired. Neither of them had ever noticed either the existence or the disappearance of the book! She now demanded whether, during her attendance on the gardner, any stranger had been admitted into the room.

“No person whatever!” was the reply.

“Most strange and most vexatious!” was her rejoinder;—adding, in the depths of her heart,—“So few as are the relics I retain of those days,—so few and so precious,—ill could I afford to part with *this*!”

"It was perhaps Master Basil who borrowed the book?" suggested Dorcas, struck with a brilliant idea. "The morning he was forced to remain here, after your ladyship's fainting fit, he was hours moping alone here, in the morning room. Perhaps he had begun to read it, and took it with him to finish on the road?"

Lady Annesley expressed a contrary conviction, and dismissed her attendant. Yet so probable was the surmise, that the moment she was alone again, she seized a pen, and addressed an inquiry on the subject to her son. She had intended deferring till the morrow intelligence of the decease of poor old Nicholas; but so eager was her desire to assure herself of the fate of her book, that she lost not a moment.

Nothing could be more embarrassing than to address Basil on the subject of their old servant's demise; for she had ventured no subsequent explanation with her son after the terrible scene in which they had borne a part; and she was consequently uncertain whether suspicions had been excited on the part of Basil, or whether he attributed the terrible revelations of the gardner solely to aberration of intellect.

The moment, however, that her mind became possessed by anxiety concerning her beloved volume, she lost sight of these considerations; and after narrating to him, with simple succinctness, the death and burial of one who, she said, "had been to her as a friend when her own kith and kin had deserted her—a good, faithful, and submissive servant, in days of adversity as in days more prosperous,"—she proceeded to inquire whether he could give her any tidings of the missing book.

"You are my only son, Basil," wrote Lady Annesley; "nay, the estrangement and prosperity of your sister render you my only heir. Yet a few years, and the little I possess will be your own. Even now, I am not, I trust, sparing in administering to your comfort,—or prodigal in the indulgence of my own. I cannot therefore think, Basil,—I would willingly not believe,—that you have surreptitiously abstracted from my house an object which you know I prize. How much I prize it, you are not able to conjecture. I shall go down to my grave, and neither you nor others will ever learn how dear—yet how cruel—are the recollections with which that relic is connected. In my solitude here, I live but in the past. *That* which is gone—those who are gone, encompass me with an atmosphere holy and precious as themselves.—The Hope that abideth in *you*—the Memory that abideth in *them*,—hath a joy which is not of this world. I know not what I write; the loss of this book has disordered me!—It seems as if one of the unrestorable treasures of past affection were wrested from me forever!

"No delay, Basil, I entreat! Write to me, if you have any communication to make touching the object in question. Fear no reproaches on my part, if it should prove that your hands indeed removed it from my house. Too happy shall I be to welcome it back again, to hazard a single accusing word!"

Such was the letter despatched from Barlington Grange!—Such the letter which Basil Annesley drew from his pocket beside a decent camp-bed established in the attic of A. O., on the fifth morning after the critical night of his disorder.

So imminent had appeared the danger of the Money-lender on the morrow of his vigils, that young Annesley—doubly alarmed by the responsibility devolving on himself should the death of a man so richly endowed occur under his solitary guardianship and circumstances so suspicious,—had despatched the sweeper for the aid of his regimental surgeon; through whose means, he had subsequently procured a proper attendant, and a few of the necessities of life.

Abednego was now too heavily oppressed by disease to take heed of the arrival of strangers or bedding in his attic; and all that Basil could do in excuse for their introduction into the treasury of treasures, should the old man survive to question his proceedings, was to seal up the doors of the different rooms and the invaluable bureau, and give up a daily portion of his time to the superintendence of the establishment.

Abednego was, however, more cognizant than he surmised, of what was passing around him. He was aware of his own danger; aware of the urgent necessity for the precautions taken; and the nurse proving a decent, dull woman, content to sit quiet in view whenever not employed in serving him, he was better satisfied she should be there, than that the house should be surrendered to the discretion of Bill the sweeper.

Still, Basil had little idea how often, during his absence, the sufferer raised his head from his pillow, to inquire of the woman in attendance the hour of the day,—the length of time that had elapsed since the young man's departure,—and what promise he had given of return. He had little idea how completely he imparted light and life to that sinking frame!—He could imagine, of course, that his disinterested services had proved acceptable to the infirm Money-lender. He knew that Abednego must be aware how solicitude in his behalf had exposed him to one of the most disagreeable dilemmas it had ever been his luck to encounter; and though such was the state of weakness consequent on the yielding of the quinsy, that they had as yet held no conversation on the subject, young Annesley naturally conceived the sufferer to be gratefully and kindly disposed. It was

enough for him, however, that so whimsical a being had not seen fit to resent his interference; and he looked forward to the convalescence of the invalid rather as a relief to himself from a painful and responsible attendance, than from any desire to receive his thanks or accord explanations in return.

The receipt of Lady Annesley's letter started him into other feelings. It was urgent that he should regain possession of the book, and lose no time in restoring it to his mother. But how was this to be accomplished? It had disappeared from the table, as well as the crucifix and paper containing the lock of hair; and the nurse, who seldom or never quitted the room, declared that she knew nothing of it. That the invalid, still scarcely able to lift his head from his pillow, should have removed it, appeared improbable; and Abednego was so weak, and, above all, so peevish from the effects of illness, that Basil had scarcely courage to molest him with inquiries.

"If he only surmised," thought young Annesley, as he sat contemplating the embarrassments of the case, "how mysterious a resemblance exists between her hair for whose pleasure I require the book, and the lock he seems to treasure with such wild devotion, he would forgive my importunity."

On entering the room on the morning he received the letter, Basil accosted the invalid with his usual inquiries concerning his night's rest, and the visit of the surgeon.

"Your doctor is to come no more," said Abednego faintly. "I paid and dismissed him last night. It was only to satisfy *you*, I bore with him, as I now bear with the old woman dozing yonder in my easy chair. But for her being here, how do I know that you would not come tormenting me again at midnight, to light my fire and snuff my candle?"

"By all this, sir, I perceive that you feel much better! It is only the man in health who quarrels with his physician. As to the nurse, you will admit her to be a safer guardian for you than a beggar from the street?" added Basil, in a lower voice.

"That is as it may prove!" retorted Abednego, gruffly. "In the time of the Plague, Defoe informs us, that such nurses used to twist the windpipes of their patients. Thank Heaven, I am now strong enough to take care of my own! However, till I can make my fire, and boil my kettle, she is welcome to remain. She 'finds herself,' as such people call it; and gives me less trouble than I give her. Nor is there much here," he continued, glancing round the naked walls, "to attract pilfering fingers."

"There were things here," Basil began,—perceiving that the nurse was really asleep, under the influence of a crackling fire on a frosty day,—“there were objects here, at the commencement of your illness, which I see no longer; and the disappearance of which makes me somewhat uneasy.”

"How mean you?"—cried Abednego, raising himself on his elbow, and pushing aside the curtains to peer out upon the bureau, which contained property to the amount of thousands upon thousands!—

"No need to look so far, or so anxiously!" observed Basil. "The things I speak of are of no such urgent value,—save perhaps to you and myself:—an iron crucifix, a timeworn book"—

"And what do you suppose to have become of them, pray?" cried Abednego, sharply,—letting fall the curtain, and sinking back again on his pillow.

"I was in hopes, sir, *you* might be able to inform me."

"And if I were—are you so miserly with your property, that you cannot trust me with an old book?"

"I would trust you with any property belonging to myself;—the care you take of your own, satisfies me that mine would run no danger of being mislaid while in your keeping. Unluckily I have little either to lend or to give; so that you are unlikely to be much the better for my confidence."

"But when I tell you that, valueless as it may seem to *you*, I hold to that book"—

"I should still be under the necessity of—"

"When I tell you," persisted Abednego, not heeding his interruption, "that it is my comfort by day and by night,—that in the anguish of my disease, it lay upon my bosom, and soothed its throbbings,—that, in the darkness of my despair, it shed light and peace around me, as from the wings of an angel—"

Basil began to entertain an opinion that the senses of the invalid were again wandering!

"When I swear to you, that while treasured here,—here, beneath my pillow—here, side by side with the emblem of eternal redemption,—dear to me as to yourself, although the lying world opprobriate me by the name of Jew,—it has yielded me more comfort than the Cross of Faith, with all its promises of heaven;—do you still desire to take it from me?—No, no! Basil, leave it,—leave it,—unless you wish to see me sink again into the bruised and breathless mummy to which I was reduced when you snatched me from the grave!"

Basil Annesley was silent. To dispute with him on a point that seemed so trifling, at a moment thus critical, seemed an act of cruelty; yet to disappoint the anxious expectations of Lady Annesley, was a deed yet more unpardonable.

"I told you, sir," said he, in a hesitating tone, and after a long

pause, "that the look was not my own, and that I had abstracted it from home without the concurrence of my mother."

"Well?"—demanded Abednego, again drawing aside the curtains and fixing his piercing eyes upon those of his visitor.

"She has demanded it back again. She is greatly displeased at my having removed it from Barlingham."

"Send her down the last new novel from Hookham's!" muttered A. O., with bitter scorn;—"the lady will doubtless consider it a profitable exchange!"

"You are too presumptuous, sir, in deciding upon the tastes and feelings of a perfect stranger," retorted Basil, with spirit. "You little know the woman you pretend to judge!—Never in my days did I see a novel in the hand of my mother! Her studies are severe as her conduct is exemplary."

"A saint, eh?—Then send her a bale of sermons from Hatchard's! What matter under what form the weak nature of woman accepts its subjugating influence? Novels,—poems,—tracts—"

"In one word," said Basil, drawing Lady Annesley's letter from his pocket, "read, and judge for yourself, whether a woman, so exalted in heart and mind as the writer of this, is likely to accept any exchange for the book she prizes!"

On seeing his mother's sacred handwriting pass into the withered hands of Abednego, Basil almost repented the concession he had made. It was degrading a letter of hers to expose it to the eyes of a Money-lender!—The deed, however, was done!

In order to give time to A. O., in his weak condition, for the perusal of the letter, Basil Annesley walked gently to the window so as not to rouse the nurse from her doze. There was nothing very interesting in the look out. A mass of icicles, appended to the leaden water-pipe of the opposite attic, was the most interesting object he found to contemplate.

At the close of a few minutes, he returned to the bedside, intending to resume his conversation with Abednego; but all was still as the grave!—No movement—not a sound!—The old man uttered not a word, and made no attempt to give back the letter. At last, in a gentle voice of expostulation, Basil addressed him, and addressed him in vain!

Young Annesley now drew aside the curtains of the bed; and found that no vestige of its inmate was perceptible. Abednego had gathered up the bedclothes over his head. Like some mourner of Scriptural times, he had covered his face with his garment, and was weeping bitterly.

Agitated, in his turn, by this unaccountable emotion, Basil Annesley was beginning to feel intolerably bewildered by the baffling mysteries that seemed to involve the fatal volume, his removal of which from Barlingham had been the cause of such general disturbance.

"For the love of Heaven, sir!" cried he, "explain all this!—Explain the interest which you and every one else appears to attach to that accursed book,—the source of distress to all with whom I am concerned!"

Still, Abednego answered not a syllable. By the movements of the clothes in which he had enveloped himself, Basil could alone infer the struggles of his emotion.

"I beseech you, sir," cried the young man, after a second pause, "if you entertain the least kindness for me,—if you feel towards me a thousandth part of the goodwill which has prompted my own exertions in your behalf,—tell me the meaning of your tears. They had not been wrung out of such a soul as yours, save by some all powerful interest. You are not woman-hearted, to weep for wantonness, or from the weakness of mere exhaustion.—Tell me—"

"I can tell you nothing," murmured Abednego, uncovering his face, and showing the letter of Lady Annesley crushed in his hand by the grasp of uncontrollable passion,—"save that this letter has roused emotions dormant for years. I had not thought,—I had not dreamed,—that this woman had retired from the world to ponder over feelings such as these!"—and again, with trembling hand, he grasped the letter.—"I believed her cold and callous as she was once worldly!—I believed,—but no matter!—These few words have wrung a dew out of the stony depths of my heart, of which I believed the fountains to be long dried up!—Thanks, Basil Annesley,—this is not the first benefit you have bestowed upon me!—Thanks! Here,—take your book!" he continued, drawing the volume from beneath his pillow. "But, unless you would convulse her heart with agony, as you have unwittingly convulsed mine, tell her not, on your life, through what strange hands it has experienced a momentary transit!—Unless you wish to be expelled for ever from your mother's house,—unless you wish to incur her malediction,—never, never, while you live, breathe in the ear of that unhappy woman, the reprobated name of Abednego Osalez!"

Ere the sufferer ceased to speak, his voice was becoming lost in broken sobs; and so terrible and absorbing was his emotion, that Basil had not courage to pursue the anxious inquiries suggesting themselves to his mind. He was overpowered by the spectacle of so profoundly-felt a grief. In order to relieve the feelings of the old man from his observation, he again rose and walked to the window, in order to straighten and restore to his pocket the book and crumpled letter replaced in his hands by Abednego.

By the time he finished his task and returned to the bedside, the old man had completely recovered his self-possession, and was lying with his face exposed in all its usual harsh composedness of feature.

"You are the comptroller of my household now," said he, addressing Basil with a grim attempt at a smile. "Tell me,—does the poor boy still officiate as my lackey?"

"Bill is installed down stairs, sir, to answer the inquiries of your numerous visitors," replied Basil, somewhat startled by his change of tone.

"Ay, ay?—I wonder, while you were about it, you had not the street laid with straw, and the knocker tied up, as for some dainty goosecap's lying in!"—muttered Abednego, forcing a laugh.

"Perhaps I might have done so, sir, but from the fear of offending you," replied Basil, attempting to smile in his turn. "Methinks I have taken liberties enough in your establishment."

"My illness must have caused no little commotion among my customers!" resumed Abednego, evidently intent upon distracting Basil's recollection from his recent struggle of feeling. "There are more people interested in the life and death of A. O. than in the fairest of the childbed puppets in fine linen, we were talking of! Sore are their misgivings, poor prodigal souls, concerning the hands into which, on my decease, their bonds and securities might fall! To them it is a matter of name and fame that the heir of the old Jew should prove a man as trustworthy as himself!"

"There has been some anxiety testified, sir, I must admit, if that be any consolation to you," replied young Annesley. "Every day, from twelve to two, the door is besieged, I am told, with applicants, concerning not alone your house in Greek Street, but dozens of other houses. But as I am by no means qualified to act as your clerk or deputy, you must consult Bill on your recovery. Having little appetite for business, I have left all such matters in his hands."

"But my letters?" inquired A. O., feeling, or affecting to feel anxiety.

"As soon as you are better, the boy shall bring them up to you."

"I am better,—I am better,—I am quite well already!" cried his companion, settling himself in bed. "I am always well enough for business!"

Having roused up the nurse by a touch on the shoulder, Basil now despatched her down stairs in search of the letters and papers left for A. O.; of which, on her return, she brought back an apron-full.

"I find that you have had certain fair inquirers," observed Basil, while the woman was away, "fully confirming your former attestation to me of the advantages of a Money-lender's calling! You have had those pressing and suing to see you,—to be admitted to see whom, others are eager suitors! You have had the Duke of Rochester here twice a day, evidently believing your illness to be a subterfuge; and in the other room, there is a whole bale of necessities,—sugar, arrow-root, wax candles,—despatched to you, not by a grocer's wife, (as the nature of the gift seems to indicate,) but by no less a person than the lovely Countess of Winterfield!"

Abednego replied by a hoarse chuckle,—

"I should starve, but for that woman; and her family might starve but for me!" cried he, turning exultingly on his pillow. "She is the purveyor of my larder—the clerk of my kitchen! Well, well! I am at least as grateful to her for her saga, tapioca, and Welsh flannel, (of which you might have found wholesale pieces had you looked in the lumber-room below, when you and the nurse were smothering me up the other night,) as she to the memory of the husband who made her what she is, and whose portrait I have in pawn yonder in my bureau!"

The nurse now re-entered the room with her burthen; and having deposited the papers on a chair beside the bed, Basil dismissed her, in order that Abednego might examine them undisturbed by her presence.

"Show me the minister who has a more voluminous correspondence on his hands than this!" cried the old man, pointing exultingly to the pile of papers. "And, pray, who paid the postage of all these letters?"

"I did, sir; that is, I supplied the money to your servant."

"So, so!—you institute yourself my banker then, as well as my *maitre d'hotel* and groom of the chambers?—With all my heart!—I am always ready to accept services and comforts I have not to pay for,—witness the tea and sugar of my Lady Winterfield!—Look here!"—he continued, pointing out, among the letters he was successively opening, several with seals that bore aristocratic emblazons,—Dukes, Marquises, Earls,—I have them all, *all* in my train! I walk like a king at his coronation, with Howards, Percys, Plantagenets, in the wake of the contemned and trampled A. O.—Thriftless fools!—some flattering,—some cajoling,—some threatening!—as if any single word they could write or utter would influence me more than the winter's wind whistling through the crannies of my casement,—unless, indeed, the Open Sesame called INTEREST!—at twenty per cent., fifty per cent., a hundred per cent.—I am willing to hear of their bonds and post-obits, their wants and distresses! But what care I for the executions in their houses, or the seizure of their family plate, or their wife's jewels? Here's a fellow writes to me," pursued Abednego, striking the open letter in his hand, "beg-

ging me to save the honor of his family mansion from the desecration of sheriff's officers, and swearing he will not survive such a disgrace!—Was it *I* who brought the disgrace upon him?—Was it *I* who decoyed him to Crockford's?—Was it *I* who induced him to hazard thousands, night after night, at piquet, when he had not even hundreds at his disposal? *Don't* let him survive his disgrace!—not the disgrace of bailiffs, but that of insolvency, brought upon himself by prodigality and vice!—When he first applied to me for assistance, he informed me, in answer to my remonstrances, (much in the terms once used by a certain Mr. Basil Annesley,) that he came for money, not advice,—that he wanted a Jew, and not a family chaplain!"

Basil was vexed to find himself coloring deeply at this allusion.

"And here," continued A. O., bringing forth a perfumed billet from among the wafered communications of attorneys and stockbrokers—ill-favored epistles from Birchin Lane, Bartlett's Buildings, and Hart Street, Bloomsbury,—"*here* is a dainty creature who wants me to oblige her with the loan of her own emeralds to appear at Windsor Castle!—The guest of royalty, forsooth!—yet writing in terms more abject than I ever heard used by Bill the sweeper to an old Money-lender!—*More* delicate handwritings.—'Lucy Maitland?'—Ay, ay!—the old china fancier!—And here, Basil—here, Mr. Annesley, is the first application from one of your brother officers!—My eye has been upon that boy these two months!—I knew I should soon have him in my books,—that is, *trying* to get into my my books; for I have enough of the family affairs on my hands with those of his precious uncle."

"*Wilberton?*—is he in difficulties?" exclaimed Annesley in a tone of regret.

"Why not—He keeps the finest company; and has a taste for opera-dancers,—as costly an item for a boy in the Guards as Sevres and Dresden to his mother. You need not blush again—I did not say opera singers, Mr. Annesley. Trust to my delicacy to make no allusion in *your* presence to any such fragile commodities!"

"I do trust to your delicacy never again to allude, with light mention, to the person at whom, though under so false a designation, you are aiming!" cried Basil, with warm indignation.

"Well, well,—no offence, no offence! Esther Verelst is, I dare say, no more fragile than her neighbours; though *that* implies no great things in the way of discretion.—'H. R.'—So! then, my Pericles, the five thousand for which you pledged your public honor, and the title-deed of an estate, in your family since they wheedled it out of the scurvy soul of James I., has not sufficed you?—You must cut a figure as a giver of banquets, must you, as well as on the Treasury Bench?—What is the joy of place, I marvel, unless its salary suffice to grease the wheels of office?—'The expenses of his very ostensible situation to be maintained!' he writes.—Jackass!—Because he chooses to have Rhenish wines and French *entrees* at his dinner, and to be a fop and a fribble as well as the first orator of the day, must he needs make false pretences to the Jews about 'the expenses of his ostensible situation?—Excellent H. R.!—though you date from Downing Street, you will not throw dust in the eyes of A. O.!—Were you half the clever fellow the world believes you, your letter would contain three lines.—'I want two thousand pounds,—can give landed security, and not more than twelve per cent.'—*That* is coming to the point; between knowing one and knowing one, the best statesmanship. I should have thought the experience of office might have taught him the futility of fine phrases,—mere loss of time to writer and reader! It is not by locking up brickbats in a plate chest, Mr. Basil Annesley, that you can convert them into family plate."

"I am afraid you will tire yourself, sir," said Basil. "I would fain see you take some nourishment before I go. Let me call up the nurse, and lay aside the remainder of these papers till the afternoon; for I have only a few minutes more to be here."

"No, no! you must wait a bit!" cried Abednego. "I have something to say to you. I have a present to make you."

"I want no presents!" cried Basil, instantly rising, and preparing for departure. "I never accepted one in my life, save from kinsman or friend."

"From the former, I suspect, my poor Basil, your gifts have been scanty enough!" ejaculated Abednego, with a degree of familiarity that served only to aggravate the displeasure of his companion. "With respect to the latter, I flatter myself I have as good a title to the name as such flimsy things as Wilberton or Maitland."

"They are my brother officers,—not my friends!" interrupted young Annesley.

"Then, how came you to accept from the latter the desk-seal, with which you daily seal your letters?" demanded Abednego, having thrown young Annesley completely off his guard, and enjoying his uncontrollable start of astonishment at this minuteness of information concerning his private affairs. "But no matter! I will not force my benefactions upon you. I do not deal in jasper desk-seals; and any day I choose, the Duca di San Catalda will give me a hundred ducats for the miniature I intended to throw away on you.—Good morning!"

The attention of Basil Annesley was arrested by this remark. He was eager for a pretext to sit down again, and await an opportunity

of renewing the conversation.

"I forgot to tell you, sir," said he, "that among the applicants for the loan of your house in Greek Street, is a picture dealer who resides in that neighborhood."

"Apropos to miniatures?" demanded Abednego, fixing his shrewd eyes, with a cunning smile, upon the young man's face.

"Apropos to your own affairs!" was the indignant rejoinder of Basil.

"As regards my own affairs, then," said the Money-lender. "I am in no such torture about the lease of my house in Soho! I have half a dozen others standing empty,—one in Park Lane,—one in St. James's Square,—and I shall soon have one, I suspect, in Arlington Street; for, unless I am much mistaken, I shall be forced to make a crash at Lord Maitland's. I have given him three years' law to redeem engagements, which I knew from the first to be thousands upon thousands beyond his power of redemption!"

"Lord Maitland!" exclaimed Basil, aghast.

"Ay! Lord Maitland! Why not, as well as another?"

"But his unfortunate wife and daughters——"

"His wife is some degrees worse than unfortunate. But that is her concern, and her husband's. As to their hopeful progeny, it is written that the sins of the parent are to be visited on their children; and seldom were less deserving children exposed to ancestral retribution. Like father, like son;—like mother, like daughters;—all empty headed fools together! But that his Lordship has been trying to defraud me of my just due, I should, however, have felt disposed to deal less harshly with him. But when I find a fellow profiting by his peerage to——"

"Pardon me if I entreat you to give me no undue insight into the private affairs of my friends," interrupted Basil, again rising from his chair, on finding that they were straying further and further from the miniature,

"Ay, ay! You are afraid of finding your chains of gold mere pinchbeck. You want an excuse to your conscience for continuing to flirt with Lord Maitland's giddy daughters, to eat his pine-apples, and drink his claret,—though certain that, by payment, they are no more his than yours!" cried A. O., with a caustic sneer. "What curious calculations might one make, after some royal or noble banquet, of the number and names of the persons at whose real expense the noble guests had been entertained!—Messrs. Grove, the fish-monger,—Giblett, the butcher,—Fisher, the poulterer,—Gunter, the confectioner,—Fortnum, the grocer,—Morel, the oilman,—Durand, the wine merchant,—Carcia, the fruiterer!"—

"You are at least making out a very tempting bill of fare, sir," interrupted Basil, anxious to get away. "I can discern a Barmecide's feast through this bare muster-roll of names"

"You are that filthy thing a *gourmand*, then, as well as the slave of a pretty face?" coolly demanded the old man. "Well, well! God mend you!—In my time, young men were content with the vices of young men!—Now-a-days, they monopolise the weaknesses of boyhood and senility,—reconciling all extremes,—the follies of beardless chins and greybeards!"

"I must again say, good morning, sir, since you seem disposed to take me so severely to task," said Basil, abruptly.

"Before you go, however, I have a service to request of you," said Abednego, suddenly lowering his voice. "Don't be afraid!—I am not going to ask you for the *look* again. You have wisely put it into your pocket, and I honor your caution. All that I have to request is, that you will break with your own hands the seals you prudently placed on yonder bureau. Here is the key," said he, producing one which Basil had already noticed under his pillow, when they effected the sick man's change of bed.

Having readily complied with Abednego's desire, Annesley stood awaiting his further orders.

"Touch the head of the brass nail to the left of the last pigeon hole," said Abednego, leaning on his elbow, and watching the proceedings of his delegate.

Basil Annesley did as he was required; when, lo! there started up, from the bottom of the old-fashioned bureau, a trap or hide, the well of which contained a variety of articles, apparently of less value than those which lay unguarded and exposed above.

"You will find a brown paper packet among those trinkets," said Abednego. "Take it out,—close the trap,—and see that the spring is secure!—Then lock the bureau, and bring me the key and the parcel."

More amused than angry at the imperative tone in which these orders were conveyed, Basil obeyed.

In another minute, he had laid both upon the pillow; and was again taking his leave, when Abednego bade him wait a moment.

With trembling hands, the old man was proceeding to undo the packet.

"Can I assist you, sir?" said Basil, conceiving that it was with this view Abednego had delayed his departure.

The old man answered not a word; though his hands trembled so exceedingly, that it was evident he would have some difficulty in accomplishing his purpose. There was a knot in the slight cord that tied up the packet.

"Better cut it," said Annesley, after a few minutes lost in unfruitful attempts, and presenting a penknife from his pocket-book for that purpose.

"Waste not—want not!" murmured the old man, in a feeble voice; and after another moment or two, Annesley perceived, to his utter amazement, that, in spite of Abednego's homely proverb, and deliberate parsimony, his feelings were so deeply involved in his task, that tears were actually falling upon the little parcel!

"Again thus agitated! thought Basil. "This must be the very weakness of disease!—Twice in one day for this iron man to evince tokens of sensibility!—Yet, *who* would believe me, were I to assert that I had seen tears shed by the stony eyes of A. O.!"

The packet was now open; but Abednego's hand not ceased to tremble, or his tears to fall.

It contained only a miniature case; and Basil's heart began to beat strongly on recalling to mind the recent allusion of his host to to such an object, in connexion with the Duca di San Catalda.

"Accept *this* from me," said the old man, placing it open in his hands.

And to the utter wonderment of Basil Annesley, he found, on opening the case, that it contained a beautiful enamel copy of Verelst's exquisite picture of the Esmeralda,—the female figure of which presenting a striking likeness of his beloved Esther!

The gift was indeed estimable!—But by what strange series of coincidences was he indebted for such a treasure to the munificence of the Money-lender—A. O.!

CHAPTER XI.

THOUGH the gift bestowed by Abednego upon young Annesley must at all times have been a most welcome one, it could not have chanced at a more auspicious moment than now; when, for the first time since the renewal of their acquaintance in England he found himself banished from the presence of Esther Verelst. He was himself moreover on the eve of exile to an opposite quarter of the town; so that even chance encounters in the street were improbable; the company of the Guards to which he belonged being under orders to march into the Tower the very day following his acceptance of the miniature from Abednego.

These Eastern quarters are rarely very inviting to the young men of fortune and family of whom the Guards are chiefly composed; unless during the summer months, when they can prevail on their gay friends of the West End to steam it to the Tower, and breakfast with them, on pretence of viewing the lions of the place; and examining the interesting autographs cut in the walls of their mess-room, by Peveril of the Peak and other prisoners of note.—But it was just then peculiarly disagreeable to Basil to find himself moated up with Wilberton and Maitland, whose secret had been accidentally placed in his keeping; or even with Loftus and Blencowe, whose insight into his own, and want of delicacy in their raileries on the subject,—he had more than once found occasion to resent. There was no remedy, however. With so little to complain of in the hardships of his military duties, Basil Annesley was conscious that it would be absurd to murmur, as an evil, against a few weeks' banishment to a remote quarter of the town.

It happened, however, that within a few days of taking up his new quarters, he was attacked with indisposition: either the result of his exertion and attendance upon the Money-lender, or of the humid atmosphere of the tower; which amounts almost to the mal'aria, and at certain seasons of the year is sure to engender a low fever in the garrison. In compassion to his illness, perhaps, the two favorite *raus* established for his persecution by his facetious friends, (his intimacy with the Verelst and with A. O.) were suffered to heal unmolested. There was not sufficient resource in the place to dispense with his aid for picquet, or whist; and the little mess-table was accordingly undisturbed by the bickerings too often produced elsewhere by the perpetual quizzing in vogue in the Maitland set. Basil did not hear above a half a dozen times a day allusions to his midnight attempt to break into the house of the Westminster Jew; and only very remote hints of his passion for the arts. Nevertheless, the very first day he was able to shake off his indisposition so far as to visit the west end of the town, in spite of the bantering to which he had been subjected, one of his first visits was to Delahaye Street. He was anxious to inquire after his patient,—he was anxious to inquire after his friend;—yes! *his friend!*—for how could he otherwise estimate the man to whom he was indebted for the semblance of that beloved face which never quitted his bosom for a moment of the day or night? Abednego appeared, indeed, to have contemplated such an appropriation of the miniature;—for it was set in a plain gold *fausse montre*, with a loop for suspension round the neck.

"I swear I am now nearly as ill myself," murmured Basil, as he drove along Great George Street, "as poor Abednego on the bitter night I brought him home here; an exploit which, I verily believe, was the cause of all my own indisposition!"

At the end of Delahaye Street he got out, and proceeded on foot to the money-lender's door.

So accustomed was he now to the untowardnesses of that rugged

household, that he did not so much as expect any notice to be taken of his rap at the door for the first ten minutes.

To his great surprise, however, scarcely two were allowed to elapse before it was opened;—not by the rough-headed sweeper—not by the rotund nurse; but by a stranger—an old Jew in all the nursery force of the term, of sinister countenance and squalid attire, stooping shoulders, rusty beard, and the physiognomy of Barabbas!

Now that Basil was certified of the disconnexion of Abednego with the hated tribe, to which his name appeared to proclaim him attached, he could not forbear being surprised and disgusted at his choosing to entertain so unsavory an individual in his household.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Osalez," said he.

"You vish vat?" demanded the new porter, with an ungracious air.

"I want to speak to your master—"

"To the tevlish wid your mastersh—" retorted the Jew, about to close the door in his face.

"I have business with A. O.!" cried Basil resolving to forestall the measure by adopting the phraseology of the place.

"Theresh no A. O. here now. The house ish shold," replied the man. "The house ish mine own, bought wid mine lawful monish—and vat have you to shay against it?"

"Will you favor me with the present address of Mr. Osalez?—He was ill when I left him a fortnight ago, and I am anxious to inquire after him."

"He may be ted now, for vat I or any one caresh!" retorted the Jew, now really fulfilling his intention by slamming the door in the face of the troublesome intruder.

Gone!—vanished like a Will-o'-the-Wisp! Most provoking!—most perplexing! Basil, who had despatched the book back to his mother on the day of his parting from Abednego, with only a few words of apology for the liberty he had taken in borrowing it from her room, had in the interim made up his mind to appeal strenuously to the sympathy of Abednego, for further information on a subject concerning which, at his present age, he felt himself entitled to explanation; and the unexpected disappearance of the old man was the heaviest disappointment he could have undergone.

Under a sudden impulse of irritation, instead of quitting the door which had been closed upon him, he knocked loudly.

"Vat ish your pleashure to make dis tevil's noish at my gatesh?" cried the angry new proprietor, instantly reopening it.

"My pleasure is to offer you a sovereign for tidings of the present residence of Mr. Osalez," cried Basil, following the axioms of A. O., and coming at once to the point.

The individual thus abruptly apostrophized, coolly jerked the proffered coin into the pocket of his dirty coat, and referred him to Abednego's former residence in Greek Street.

"Fool that I was, not to think of it myself!" muttered Basil, and away he hurried to drive off like mad towards Soho.

Arrived in Greek Street, however, his hopes were again frustrated. Scaffolding was established against the walls; and bricklayers and plasterers were at work. The house was let, it appeared, for twenty one years; and the workmen knew not so much as the name of the former proprietor.

"I was in hopes they were going to refer me back to Paulet Street," said Basil to himself, in the bitterness of his heart. "Nay, without their reference, I suppose it will end with my having to travel once more to St. Agnes le Clare. A better alternative, certainly, than advertising in the *Times*, or *Hue and Cry* for the present abode of A. O."

In the excitement of feeling produced by his disappointment, he even determined on a personal inquiry at the door of Verelst, which he promised himself never again to approach till recalled by the artist; and though he had the vexation of hearing, syllable by syllable, the same message delivered to him a fortnight before, that the young ladies were "out," and the painter and his wife "engaged," he had at least the comfort of finding that Mrs. Verelst was convalescent.

"The young ladies are well, I hope?" said he, turning away his face as he hazarded the inquiry.

"Quite well, sir,—that is, except Miss Esther, who has been poorly for some time," said the maid, in a confused manner.

"But you said she was *out*?"

"Yes, sir—that is—sir—the family don't see any more company, I was ordered on no account to let nobody in," said the girl still more embarrassed; and Basil, vexed as he was, having no further plea for inquiry, had only to express his regret at the young lady's indisposition, and walk away.

He returned that day to the Tower in a mood of mind rendering it extremely fortunate that his companions received him on his arrival with yawns, rather than pleasantries. Maitland and Wilberton were growing too dull to find spirits for quizzing; and finding that he brought them no news from St. James Street, they soon returned to the snooze before a roasting fire, from which his return had bestirred them.

Esther ill; Abednego vanished! No means of inquiry after either! By degrees the state of suspense to which Annesley was reduced, became too intolerable to be borne. In the dreary isolation of the

Tower, he had nothing better to occupy his time, than to ponder over his perplexities; till he finally became so overmastered by his feelings, as to take the desperate resolution of applying to Wilberton and Maitland for information. He had every reason to infer that they at least must be cognizant of the money-lender's removal; and at the risk of incurring their sneers, boldly inquired of them, one night, as they were separating for bed, whether they could favor him with the present address of A. O. Each looked at the other: the one with surprise; the other with indignation. Wilberton with his usual boisterous folly burst into a horse-laugh; but John Maitland accepted the question almost as an insult. He had not forgotten Basil's allusion to the money-lender in Arlington Street, a day or two after A. O.'s awkward appearance on the scene; and felt convinced that Annesley must be fully aware of his family difficulties.

"You had better look in the Court Guide," said he; "or in the Directory, under the head of money-lender. Should these resources fail, I dare say the thief-takers of Bow street can give you information concerning your friend."

Maitland had quitted the room before Basil recovered breath to reply. Resolved to carry out their mutual explanations on the morrow, when John Maitland's groundless anger would have subsided, he returned to the corner where he had been seated, and, more from listlessness than with any settled purpose, took up from the table the Court Guide, which was lying beside the Annual Army List, (the two classics of London mess rooms,) and turned to the letter O.

The patronymic of Osalez was too foreign to admit of much expectation of finding it there at all. Nevertheless, immediately preceding a long catalogue of O'Shannessy's, there appeared the name of Osalez three times repeated:—

Osalez, Bernard, Esq., 14, Poland street.

Osalez, R. Esq., 4, Abbey Road, Regent's Park.

Osalez, A. Esq., 74, Bernard street, Russell Square.

Now, though A. Osalez, Esq., might import Andrew, Augustus, Alfred, Allan,—or fifty other names,—Basil could not for the life of him, but hope and believe that the auspicious initial stood for no other than "Abednego." There might be dilapidated houses to be bought, sold, or exchanged, in Bernard street as well as elsewhere; at all events, he was determined that the morrow should clear up his doubts; and, accordingly, at the very time he had previously promised himself to have a clearing up with Maitland, was approaching on foot the door of a substantial-looking house in Bernard street, Russell Square.

"What a thrice double ass I must be," was his secret commentary on his own weakness, "to fancy that such a man as A. O. would allow his abode to become a matter of advertisement in Boyle's Court Guide."

The nearer he approached the house, the more he became assured of his folly. Not a vestige, in the comfortable, clean, and modern residence before him, of the tumble-down nature of A. O.'s habitual resorts,—not a token of occasion for a "repairing lease," in Bernard street, Russell Square, not a brick discolored, not an atom of mortar displaced in the pointing. The door was varnished, the knocker lustrous,—the steps bath-bricked into snowy whiteness, not a speck under the scraper; and the A. Osalez of the Court Guide would have become an old maid of independent fortune, in Basil's apprehension, but for the qualifying designation of "esquire."

"At all events, as I am utterly unknown in this quarter of the town, I can knock and make inquiry," cogitated Basil; and the summons having been answered by a grave-looking family butler, he was informed, in answer to his formal demand, that "Mr. Osalez was out."

"Has he not been recently indisposed," demanded young Annesley.

"My master, sir, has just returned to town."

Recollecting Abednego's diatribe against the ruinous waste of pampered menials, and estimating the expenses (perquisites included) of so respectable looking a gentleman as he had the honor of addressing, at between two and three hundred per annum, Basil almost smiled at his own infatuation in persisting in his inquiries. He was duly sensible of the impossibility of the money-lender having affinity with the proprietor of an abode so comfortable, a servant so much its master.

"I called here for the purpose of inquiring after a relation of Mr. Osalez," hazarded Basil, by way of excuse to the butler for not leaving his card.

"I am not aware, sir, that my master has any relations," replied the man, assuming an air of dignity and mistrust. "I have been some years in his service, and never heard of any."

"In that case," said Basil, "I am mistaken; I understood that Mr. Abednego Osalez was connected with him."

"My master's name, sir, is Abednego," replied the butler, evidently growing impatient of so long an interrogatory on so cold a day, the chilly breezes of which had already dislodged a portion of powder from his cauliflower head.

"At what hour is Mr. Osalez likely to be at home?" inquired the overjoyed Basil.

"I really can't take upon me to say, sir. His time of returning from the city is very uncertain."

Young Annesley longed to hazard an inquiry what especial business or calling took him habitually to the city; but destitute of pretext for such impertinent curiosity, he found nothing better to say than that he would call again—nothing better to do than to slink away,—leaving the dignified butler of the opinion that he had been summoned from his afternoon doze in the pantry (or more probably before the dining-room fire, with the *Morning Herald* in his hand by way of a screen) to very little purpose, and by a very suspicious young gentleman.

Meanwhile, scarcely had Basil reached the corner of the street, when there drove past him, at a brisk pace, a plain but handsome chariot, to which he should have scarcely raised his eyes in Arlington street; but which, in the neighborhood of Russell Square, assumed something of an aristocratic grace: nay, as it glanced along, he caught a glimpse of a head within, which, but for the impossibility of such a transition—he could have sworn to be that of A. O.

"The old man's face is running in my head," said he, vexed at his own folly; "and like Sir Thomas Browne, when writing upon quincunxes, I descry one in every object in nature. Not an old clothesman passes me, but I fancy I can trace a resemblance to Abednego! And now to be equally struck by the likeness of the proprietor of a pair of horses worth four hundred guineas, to a man who grudges himself a hackney-coach!"

At that moment, however, he recalled to mind his collision with a similar carriage, when driving with Blencowe, opposite to Hatchell's nearly a month before; and the assertion of his companion that it's solitary inmate was none other than the renowned A. O.!

He had half a mind to return and verify the fact; but already, while pursuing his train of recollections, and trying to recal to mind whether he had actually seen the face of the money-lender in the brown chariot, on the day in question, he had reached half way across Russell Square; and by the time he had retraced his steps into Bernard street, the carriage had disappeared. He had not courage to reconfront the portly butler in order to ascertain whether in the interim it had deposited its inmate at the door of Mr. Osalez.

Moreover, he had a commission to execute for Wilberton at Lawrence's, concerning the progress of a new dressing-box, the building of which had only reached the second story, requiring him to be in Bond street at a certain hour, to meet a workman who was to receive orders concerning the admeasurement of the compartments; and there was no time to lose.

Still, the subject nearest his heart was not forgotten amid the perplexities of patent hinges, and the shades of green morocco or purple velvet; and after taking a sandwich and a glass of sherry at the Club, and asking every one in vain for news to carry back to the ark from which he had been permitted to escape, he sent for Wilberton's cab, which he had promised to drive back to the Tower, and prepared for departure.

"Surely," argued Basil with himself, with singular disregard to metropolitan topography, "it would make little difference were I to drive round by Russell Square, and so along the City Road? I feel that I shall not sleep till I have cut through the heart of this perplexing mystery."

It is surprising how vaguely we admeasure distances, when they regard the legs and horses of other people. Having convinced himself that he was taking almost the nearest way, by half-past five o'clock, Basil was dashing along through the lighted streets, towards Bernard street, Russell Square; and emboldened by a couple of glasses of sherry, he desired Wilberton's tiger to knock at the door before which he checked his horse, and inquire whether "Mr. Osalez were at home."

A footman in a plain livery now appeared to reinforce the butler; and who having answered in the affirmative, Basil had no alternative but to jump out and follow the servant, who was already preceding him to the drawing-room with the name he had received from the tiger, up the richly-carpeted and well-lighted stairs. Basil's heart almost quailed, as he followed his pilot in this vague voyage of discovery. How was it possible that this could be the new abode of A. O.? All was as well established and regular as if the proprietor were already a grandfather, succeeding in name of inheritance to a grandfather of his own.

The door of the drawing room being now thrown open, and the name of "Mr. Annesley" articulately announced, there was no receding; and struck by the unusual gleam of light within, it occurred to Basil, that the rooms were prepared for a dinner-party, and that he passed with the servants for one of the guests!

Nor was he mistaken. On clearing the threshold, he perceived that half a dozen grave-looking gentlemen were assembled round the fire-place;—one or two seated in cozy arm chairs,—one or two standing chatting together upon the hearth-rug. He would have given worlds to retreat!—Never had he felt himself so completely an intruder!—Not a face in the room,—all of which were turned towards him,—had he ever beheld in his life!

Nevertheless, the servants had now retired, closing the door behind them; while he looked around in indescribable dismay, hoping to determine, from the attitude of the persons present, which of them was the master of the house, to whom his apologies were due. But a dead silence had followed the announcement of his name; and no one seemed more particularly surprised than the rest at his joining the party.

At length this portion of the mystery was explained. A solemn-looking old gentleman, with a high narrow forehead, a pair of nankeen shorts and discolored white silk stockings, many degrees inferior in external presentment to the butler, stepped graciously forward from the rug to the carpet, to announce to the confused young man, that "Mr. Osalez would make his appearance in a moment,—having had letters of importance to answer, after his return from the city."

Annesley bowed and tried to be thankful. At all events, he judged that it would be better to await the coming of the master of the house and make apologies to him, than to hurry through explanations unintelligible and unimportant to the guests, and sneak off with the air of a detected pickpocket. He had time, therefore, to examine the apartment; which, though simply, was richly furnished;—with two or three striking pictures and two or three noble bronzes by way of ornament. The conversation his arrival had interrupted was now resumed, though little to his advantage—for not a syllable uttered by the five elderly gentlemen conveyed the smallest meaning to his ear! It was a mystery of which he did not possess the key;—being neither more nor less than the jargon of bankers and stock-brokers!

Not daring to seat himself, he stood, hat in hand, awaiting the opening of the door, and wishing himself fifty fathoms under the foundations of the White Tower, or anywhere else, rather than a drawing-room in Bernard street, Russell Square. Had there been women present, he would have felt less embarrassed; the tact and courtesy of the sex readily supplying excuses for the indiscretion of one of his age and appearance. But those five solemn old men, in their knee-breeches and buckled shoes,—their white side curls or bald crowns,—amounted to the awful. He would as soon have interrupted a solemnization of the priests of Isis and Osiris in the Great Pyramid.

At length, a step approached the drawing-room door;—and though Basil's blood ran cold with nervousness, his cheeks glowed with blushes as the door opened, and the master of the house made his appearance!

"I have a thousand apologies to offer you, gentlemen," said a voice which yielded instant confirmation to the astounding conviction which a first glance had produced in the mind of Basil,—“I have a thousand apologies to offer you!—a messenger from Downing street was awaiting me on my return. I fear I have appeared very long. But dinner will be served in a moment.”

Mr. Osalez now shook hands in turn with his elderly guests, addressing to each some distinguishing word of compliment. When it came to the turn of Basil to be noticed, the young man's heart sank within him. He was prepared for a start of surprise—a sarcastic reproof! It did not occur to him that, his name having been already privately announced to his host by the servants, no surprise, at least, would be manifested. So far, however, from hearing the sarcasms he had anticipated, even his apologies were forestalled by the well-bred courtesy of Mr. Osalez.

"I rejoice to see you, my dear Annesley," said he. "You must leave it to me to apologize to my old friends here, for your appearance among them in your morning dress,—my invitation, I know, reached you too late this evening, to admit of your dressing to join our party. You have shown, indeed, far higher breeding than myself,—by preferring your own discomfort to keeping others waiting."

So perfect was the self-possession of A. O. while uttering this explanation, that Basil was for a moment really posed to determine whether he might not really have been invited, and the letter of invitation missed him.

"Believe me, I had not the smallest intention of intruding upon your party—" he was beginning. But Osalez stopped him short. "I have sent away your cabriolet till eight o'clock," said he—"that hour will, I believe, admit of your returning in time to the Tower."

There was something so collected and so positive in the manner of his host, that Basil, seeing at once he was resolved to detain him, conceived that the best thing he could do for the furtherance of his own objects, was to coincide in the decision of his extraordinary friend. He had no leisure for deliberation, indeed, for at that moment dinner was announced; and on proceeding to the warm and comfortable dining-room, he saw that a seventh cover had been added to the richly-laid, round table.

Never had Basil felt more embarrassed than on taking his place!—Never had he felt more thoroughly out of place!—Those grave-looking old men,—the mysterious host, who, by his composed manner of disposing of him, seemed to possess some preternatural influence over his destinies.—But by degrees the influence of light and warmth, capital wines, and an excellent dinner, exercised their genial influence on soul and body. Basil had been accustomed to feast with the great. The tables of the Duke of Rochester and Lord Maitland, of both of whom he had been of late a frequent guest,

were cited by the world as uniting all that a *cordon bleu*, a first rate French cook, Italian confectioner, and German *matre d'hotel*, could produce in the way of *savoir vivre*.—But it struck him that he had never seen fish, flesh, and fowl, in such exquisite perfection as now; and it amused him not a little to hear the venerable gentlemen treat of such matters, not only with the intense *gusto* invariably attributed by old books to Aldermen, (a proof among many others that we derive our civilization from the East,) but as though the city were the fountain-head of the good things of this world; and that Billingsgate, Smithfield, and Farringdon, despatched to the West End only their refuse produce, after dedicating the finest to the heavier purses of the aristocracy of Guildhall. He had not been accustomed in Arlington street to hear turtle and venison treated of as things unknown, in perfection, on the Western side of Temple Bar!

But it was not the mere gastronomy of the dinner that warmed his heart. It was most edifying to see the grave faces of the six old gentlemen relax under the influence of that convivial atmosphere. Warmed by the stimulus of wine, such as never before had reached his lips, (the juice of the grape pure from the wine-press of the sunny South, mellowed only by the hand of time, instead of the drugged and fiery decoctions to which messes and clubs had habituated his palate!) they soon expanded into cheerfulness;—and he had occasion to note the difference between the man of intelligence and information unfolding his stores under such influence, and the empty noise produced by similar excitement upon his usual companions.—You might as well have attempted to intoxicate an exciseman's guage, as produce more than a certain effect on the well-seasoned brains of these good livers of half a century's experience. With them, the opener of the heart and mind served only to bring out, with freer expansion, their prodigious stores of knowledge of the world.

And what a world!—How illimitable did Basil's horizon seemed to expand as he listened. Hitherto his notions of "the world" might have been geographically defined as "bounded on the North by Marylebone,—on the South by Lambeth,—the East by St. Martin's Lane,—the West by Kensington Gardens." But he now heard America and China familiarly talked of as lying within the ring-fence of the kingdom of Mammon!—India seemed regarded as a home-farm by these old gentlemen; and the spice islands were their flower gardens!—Their caravans were traversing the wilderness, like the private post of some lordly establishment. As to Europe,—poor, common-place, domestic Europe,—each of them had his courier galloping homewards from Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin—like Horse Guards' *estafettes*, trotting backwards and forwards to Hampton Court or Hounslow.—As to Paris, it was a toy—a snuff-box, that seemed to lie in their waistcoat pocket!

While these facts were gradually transpiring, not in the way of vaunt but in the course of conversation, Basil naturally expected that a triumphant glance of the eye from Abednego would furtively intimate to him—"Behold! these are the kings of whom I spake!—the Kings of Tarsus and Epirus, of Tyre and Sidon,—these are the master-hands that move the wires of kingly puppets,—these are the main-springs of aristocratic action,—these are they without whom privy-councils and parliaments might mouth and gibber in vain,—these are the veritable monarchs who make peace and war;—these are the potentates who created the independence of America, who rendered France a citizen kingdom,—and would do as much for the British empire, had peer-ridden England the smallest taste for enfranchisement."

But not a look—not a word—not a syllable,—implied peculiar significance or understanding between himself and his host.—He probably passed, to those elderly sovereigns, as some protegee to whom Osalez deigned to extend no more than the protecting notice of admitting him occasionally to his board; and each in succession took wine with him in the encouraging manner with which they would have patronized a school-boy at home for the holidays. They refrained not from their usual discourse in mistrust of the presence of this one accidental stranger; neither did they seek to find in him more than a listener; but continued to treat of kings and ministers in all quarters of the globe,—as so many implements for coining in the hands of those real masters of the world,—the money-mongers of its various exchanges.

It was interesting, however, to young Annesley to perceive that there was nothing of assumption or braggart in their self-assertion. In the House of Commons, in the Clubs, at the convivial meetings of the West End, he had been often disgusted by the tone of flippancy or bullying assumed whenever the deferences of life were laid aside. But here, all was decorous as in the Upper House with the Bench of Bishops and the Woolsack as dead weights upon the buoyancy of human nature. It was the magnanimous exercise of power, like the quiet lifting of an elephant's trunk to sport with the child it might, if angered, encoil and crush. These great financial operators, whose electric wires communicated from one end of the world to the other, would as soon have thought of jesting over the bankruptcy of kingdoms, or the necessities of princes, of which they were treating,—as the Home Department would think of perpetrating a pun over a death-warrant!

Still less, however, were they grave or pompous; and many an

amusing anecdote transpired connected with the statesmen or measures of the day, that might have told less well elsewhere, but derived peculiar charm from the authenticity certified by the *genius loci*.

For Anne-ley was beginning to understand with whom he was dipping in the dish.—The names by which he heard his companions mutually addressed, were those he knew to be attached to loans and other gigantic financial operations, and saw announced by the papers as having audiences of the Chancellor of the Exchequer;—men whose names, inscribed on a sheet of paper, create a railroad that is to facilitate the intercommunication of kingdoms,—an Argentine Republic, a county hospital, or an insurrection in Cochin China!

Over a dessert, the forced fruit, lime-ice, and Chateau Laffitte of which would have caused the Duke of Rochester's eyes to glisten, the host and his most potent, grave, and reverend Signiors of guests, sat gossiping of the State affairs of the world, as though their little synod constituted the privy-council of the universe. They talked of the politics of Europe as men talked of the tactics of a game of chess, over which they have the disposal;—of sovereigns, as if in their degrees the ivory or ebony or box-wood pieces of the board. The identity of such privileged portions of human nature was evidently unimportant to their calculations.—There was no Nicholas,—no Francis,—no Frederick William to the high-priest of Mammom; but in their places, Prussia, Hardenberg and Co.,—Austria, Metternich and Co.,—Russia, Nesselrode and Co. Of money itself, under the august name of CAPITAL, they treated as he had never heard it treated before,—as an end and not a mean;—and millions sounded in their mouths less than the pennies, or even the pounds, he was accustomed to hear betted elsewhere. In the arguments of that singular coterie, there was matter to drive thrice as many Political Economists to distraction!

In the midst of the discussion, young Annesley could not forbear reverting with degree of amazement, amounting almost to the ludicrous, to the sense of compassion which he had, so short a time before, accosted the old money-lender of Greek street; and the terrors with which, in his necessity for a paltry loan of £300, he had undergone his cross-examination in the presence of the redoubtable A. O.!

CHAPTER XII.

THE pleasantries with which Basil Annesley had been of late persecuted by his brother officers concerning his unaccountable intimacy with and predilection for the notorious Money-lender, would unquestionably have been renewed on the evening of the day in question, could they have surmised the series of strange events which brought him back flushed and agitated to the Tower, a few seconds before the expiration of the garrison hour. But he offered no explanations; and having two or three important pieces of political news to communicate, (acquired among the pro, bets of the Stock Exchange,) besides an anecdote of the Dowager Colonel's having fallen on his nose behind the scenes of one of the theatres, to the displacement of his hat, wig, and proboscis,—they let him off without much severity of cross-examination, and scarcely a single reproach.

It was not till alone, and in the silence of the night, that Basil began to inquire of himself whether all that had of late befallen him, were not the unreal mockery of a dream;—whether there really existed either an Abednego the Money-lender, or a high bred and luxurious banker or stock-broker, or bill-broker, named Osalez.

Perplexed by his reflections and fevered by unusual excess, he was unable to close his eyes; or if he closed them for a moment it was to be farther derided and perplexed by the confused dreams of indigestion; wherein his mother and Esther were intermingled with the dying man in the old attic in Westminster, and the Jew usurer who had relieved his pecuniary difficulties and bestowed upon him the richest treasure in his possession.

Nor did the morning sun bring its usual comfort and enlightenment. The more he reflected on these mysteries, the more they appeared to darken. He had lost all confidence in his own powers of perception,—in his own powers of volition. This strange man,—this *ignis fatuus*,—this Djinn,—this mysterious influence,—appeared to enfold his destinies as with the coil of a Boa-constrictor, and the capability of crushing him at will;—and under this persuasion, endured in solitary irritation day after day, the health of Basil, which had been almost re-established, again began to give way. He was soon confined to his room,—wanting either power or inclination to cross the drawbridge: nor was this any source of regret to him. Denied access to the house of Verelst—too proud to seek it again,—to that of a man whom he now recognised as rich and powerful, and on whom he had the claim of benefits conferred,—he had not the smallest inclination to quit his retirement.

It was a severe season. Though the Spring was approaching, a six-weeks' frost filled the clubs of St. James's street with hunting men, and augmented the wisdom and divisions of parliament with the number of its county members; yet Basil was perfectly satisfied to remain day after day in his quarters. To beguile his *ennui*, he took opportunity to renew, as Esther had often entreated him, his study of the German language, which, since his departure from Heidelberg, he had suffered to grow rusty. For he had been struck,

at his dinner in Bernard street, with the advantage which those puissant old men seemed to derive from their familiarity with modern languages. French, Italian, and German, were familiar to them as English; (a circumstance strongly indicative of their own foreign origin;) and they appeared to verify the axiom of Charles V., that "so many languages as a man possesses, so many times is he a man."

It was in vain his brother officers reviled him by the name of "sap," and protested that Nancy was going to advertise for a place as finishing-governess. He adhered to his seclusion and submitted to be thought a bore rather than join in pleasures for which he had lost all inclination.

The insight he had incidentally obtained from A. O. into the prospects of Wilberton and John Maitland, rendered it doubly disagreeable to him to see them indulging in habits of expense unsuited to their means; and as they refused to listen to his remonstrances, and at first replied to them with repartees concerning the views and principles he was contracting among his Jewish associates, which he was compelled to silence by a serious explanation, there was nothing for it but to adhere to his own pursuits, and pass for a churl.

Meanwhile the old artist, Verelst, who had denied his benefactor even a single interview, was now reaping the rich benefits which the facilities afforded by Basil's introductions, had conferred upon him; and the advantageous bargains made by him under the management and protection of Basil Annesley were beginning to bring forth their fruits. They were getting in some degree above the world; and the comfort of seeing her family better clothed, better fed, and without fear for the morrow, had done more to restore strength and courage to Mrs. Verelst than all the previous advice and medicaments of the physicians. Moreover, there was prospect of improvement for the little household. Placed at ease by the payment of his military sketches, the artist had ventured to give once more the reins to his imagination in the completion of a picture representing the Johanna von Orleans of Schiller bidding adieu to her native valley; which had been admitted, among cartloads of works of art more or less deserving, to the honor of the Exhibition. For the twentieth time in his life, therefore, the artist was smoothing the plumage of new-fledged Hope,—a bird of promise which, like the Phoenix, has the faculty of giving birth from its ashes to a successor fresh and fair as the one of recent extinction.

The girls, meanwhile, had very much regretted the absence of Basil Annesley. To them, his disappearance from among them was fraught with mystery. They knew nothing of his being quartered in the Tower; they knew nothing of their father's reasons for denying the young man admittance to their society; and though accidentally apprized that their former friend appeared from time to time at the door with inquiries after the health of their mother, this total change in their habits of intercourse increased rather than diminished their surprise. Salome's frank expressions of regret at his absence had produced from her parents the most chilling reproof; and ever since, by tacit consent of all parties, the subject was dropped.

The lodgings inhabited by the Verelsts were of such circumscribed dimensions that the two girls slept in a small room within that of their mother, upon whom they took it in turns to attend, by day and night; so that there was no opportunity for those sisterly confidences which, in more splendid households, are the origin of such wanton waste of time and sensibility. Nevertheless, Esther sometimes found a moment to whisper to Salome that it was strange Basil should so suddenly have withdrawn his interest from them; just as, occasionally, Salome found means to express to Esther her wonderment whether it would ever enter into her father's plans to return to Germany; and whether, even if they went back to their beloved Heidelberg, they might not find the Count von Ehrenstein a happy husband and father; and satisfied that, by the gift of Albert Durer's sketch-book to his old master, he had discovered all ties of gratitude or affection with the family once so dear to him. Each sister offered, indeed, to the other such consolation as her philosophy suggested; but both agreed that Basil's voluntary absence arose from scruples of conscience suggesting the danger of encouraging sentiments of mutual attachment, which could only end in disappointment and remorse.

Such was the position of their affairs, and such the monotonous tenor of their existence,—(unconnected with the passing events of the day by even the perusal of a newspaper,) when one morning, as the artist was standing absorbed before a new canvass, on which he was beginning to sketch, with some enthusiasm, the rude outline of a new historical picture, he was roused from his reverie by a slight touch on the shoulder, and found that a stranger was standing behind him:—a man of simple but gentlemanly exterior, who, unobserved by the artist, had been introduced into the room by the servant on the plea of business with her master.

"I have the pleasure, I believe, of addressing Mr. Verelst," said he, "whom I have had more difficulty in tracing out, than ought to have been the case with the painter of such works as those I see around me."

As he spoke, the visiter glanced towards the two pictures from the *Nibelungen Lied*, which still occupied their post of disgrace against the wall;—and the poor simple artist who, from the seclusion of his

habits of life, was becoming daily less and less a man of the world, felt so puzzled by hearing compliments addressed to himself by a man of such courtly manners, stood gazing in amazement, as if puzzled to determine whether he were not the victim of a mystification.

"I have reason to imagine," resumed the stranger, "that a painting which I bought nearly a year since, of a picture-dealer of the name of Stubbs, (representing the marriage of Cana,) as the work of Poussin, is in reality a production of your pencil,—and though I plead guilty to having been the dupe of my own ignorance in the purchase,—(for after all the detection of the fraud rested with myself)—it grieves me much to believe that, of the price I paid for it, (four hundred guineas,) perhaps not a tenth part reached the hands of the admirable artist with whom it originated."

"Not a *twentieth* part!" rejoined Verelst, with a smile. "I remember the picture only too well. I had grounded great expectations upon it; but was forced, by the necessities of my family, to sell it at a moment's notice for a paltry ten-pound note!"

"Ten pounds!"—reiterated the stranger, shrugging his shoulders. "The rogue,—the robber!—I had a hard matter to get it from him at less than the five hundred guineas he originally asked me. I have bought many other pictures of him, at high prices, of some of which perhaps you may be able to indicate the true origin, which I am now beginning to suspect as bringing sad discredit upon my connoisseurship. With this view, sir, I have been making strenuous efforts to discover your abode. As some inducement to you to accord me the favor of a visit to my collection, I would willingly induce you to bring with you the two noble pictures I see on your hands, if, indeed, the value you set on them be not above my reach."

As he spoke, the courteous customer began to examine with care and interest the pair of pictures, on which the disappointed artist had almost ceased to pride himself, or found expectations of profit.

"I once prized these pictures, as a partial man is too apt to prize his favorite work!" said Verelst, standing beside his visitor to contemplate his neglected pictures. "I once rated them at a couple of hundred guineas! But I am sick of the sight of them; and should be glad to dispose of them for a quarter of the sum."

"That were a most unjust self-injury," observed the stranger,— "particularly where the original appraisement was so modest. On the contrary, I shall be most happy to write you a cheque for the full amount. You are, in fact, doubly entitled to it,—for I have every expectation of obtaining, through your testimony, restitution of the price of my pretended Poussin."

Verelst began to stammer expressions of surprise and thankfulness; but the visitor interrupted him with a request for a pen and ink.

"If you present this draft at Coutts'," said he, offering to Verelst a printed paper he had taken from his pocket-book, "you will find it honored: after which, I shall ask you the favor to bring the pictures in person to my house."

Verelst, having glanced, as well as his confusion would permit, at the name subscribed to the bottom of the cheque, saw with pride and exultation that it was that of the Marquis of —; a nobleman honored by the high estimation of artists and men of letters.

"If you can so arrange your engagements," added the marquis, —interrupting his acknowledgments, "you would do me an additional favor by bringing them at twelve o'clock; at which hour, you would find a vacant place at my breakfast table, and meet there the gentleman to whom I am indebted for the discovery of the fraud practised upon me, as well of your name and address;—an enlightened patron of the arts, doubtless known to you by name,—my friend, Mr. Osalez."

A faint cry bursting from the lips of the artist's wife, intimated at that moment, for the first time, to the marquis, that a third person was present at the interview, and that the easy chair placed beside the open window with its back towards them, contained the emaciated form of Mrs. Verelst, to whose side her husband now rushed in consternation.

Agitated by a thousand conflicting emotions on learning the tide of good fortune which would enable her husband to discharge the obligations, which had weighed so heavily on the minds of both, to the offending Basil, the poor invalid had been unable to control the revulsion of feeling occasioned by the discovery that they were indebted for this overpowering benefit to the interposition of A. O.!

CHAPTER XIII.

ON returning to his lodgings at the Tower, one evening, after a day's absence the first circumstance communicated to Basil by his landlord,—(the retired butler of a noble family,)—was, that a shabbyish looking person had called repeatedly during the day with earnest inquiries concerning the moment and manner of his arrival.

"A gentleman?"—inquired Basil, who, being out of debt, had less apprehension of shabby-looking persons calling with inquiries, than might have been the case with Maitland or Wilberton.

"Why, I should say, yes, sir," replied the man, "though there warn't much matters to boast of in the coat on his back.—But he spoke like a person of education."

Basil smiled approvingly at the distinction, which did not, however,

assist his guesses.—At length, it occurred to him, so strongly as to bring the color to his face, that the mysterious stranger was most likely the Protean Abednego; a suspicion fully confirmed by the information which his minute inquiries now managed to elicit.

"And he said he would call again?"—demanded young Annesley.

"This very evening, sir,—he said he would be sure to look in this evening."

And the tone of glee in which the young guardsman hastened to give orders that the moment his strange visitor arrived he should be admitted into his sitting-room, relieved the mind of the landlord, (with whom his first floor was a first favorite,) from a suspicion that "a small account,"—a name usually given to a very large one, had been the cause of the spontaneous change of color.

"I shall come home immediately after dinner to meet this gentleman," observed the young guardsman; "but if by chance he should arrive here first, you would infinitely oblige me, Mr. Smith, by detaining him till I come."

Thus adjured, Mr. Smith lost no time in converting the shabby-genteel man into a rich uncle of eccentric habits; and, accordingly, when the stranger *really* made his appearance, he was received with all the state and ceremony due to the Ambassador of one of the Great Powers!—Ten minutes only had he been seated, however, in the favorite arm chair of Basil beside his shaded reading lamp, when the young man, who had hurried home from the house dinner of the Club, entered the room.

"Verelst!"—cried he, starting at sight of his unexpected guest; "this is indeed a most agreeable surprise!—I was afraid you had dismissed me altogether from your recollection!"

"It is not so easy to dismiss those altogether from our recollection, Mr. Annesley," gravely rejoined the old artist, "towards whom we have heavy obligations."

"If such be your only motive for remembering me," cried Basil, warmly, "God knows I have little desire to occupy a place in your memory. Unless remembered as one, towards whom, in a foreign country, in sickness and neglect, you did the part of a kinsman,—one whom you admitted to sit before your household fire, one to whom you conceded almost the privileges of a son, one who has never ceased to regard you as a father,—I would fain be utterly forgotten."

Basil flung down his hat impetuously on a chair, while uttering this tender expostulation; to which Verelst replied only by turning away, as if seeking for some papers he had placed on the table beside him.—But Basil fancied when the old man again addressed him, that there was a kindly moisture in his eye, as though his own words had not been utterly disregarded. Still, the painter attempted no direct reply to the appeal.

"I am come, sir," said he, evading the question of such reminiscences, "with a thankful and rejoicing heart, to discharge the obligations you so nobly conferred upon me. It would have been easy to do so by letter, or through the intervention of a third person: but I was unwilling, my dear Mr. Annesley, you should a moment suppose that, because able to return back the exact tale of monies you generously disbursed on my account, I had become unmindful of the favor, never to be forgotten, which your timely aid bestowed with them on me and mine.—Letters are cold and dry in the expressions of such feelings as now swell within my bosom. Nor should I have found it easy so to define my own sentiments as to render you sensible with what fervor I and mine recognise the extent of our obligations, without overlooking the cruel manner in which you have attempted to force your way into the painful secrets of a family, which had withheld nothing else from your participations."

"As I live and breathe, my dear Verelst," cried Basil, eagerly, "I have not the most remote suspicion to what you allude: nor did I ever, in your case, or any other, attempt to possess myself unhand-somely of the secrets of other people!"

The artist gravely shook his head; and taking from the pocket book beside him three notes of £100 each, placed them in the hand of Basil, who had now seated himself on the opposite side of the table.

"I am glad you bring me these," cried Basil Annesley, laying them caressly down, "because it is a proof that you are more prosperous than when I had the happiness of enjoying your society. But what is the return of this money compared with that of your friendship! I fondly trusted, on seeing you under my roof, that you were come to tell me my unknown offence was forgiven:—that you had repented your injustice towards me;—that you were again about to open your arms and heart to one who has no desire on earth so urgent as to find them unclosed to him as of old. I swear to you, dear sir, that never, from the first moment of our acquaintance, have I cherished a thought or feeling that was not kindness itself towards you!"

"In that case," replied the artist, evidently much moved, and gazing upon the agitated young man with eyes which the tenderness of an almost paternal affection filled with tears,— "in that case, why insult my wife by disclosing to her that you have discovered her family connexion with one who—but no matter!"

"On my honor as a gentleman," cried Annesley, "I have made no discoveries,—I have intentionally offered no insult. As regards the family connexions of Mrs. Verelst, she may be, for anything I know to the contrary, the daughter of a peer or the daughter of a

peasant!—I never heard,—I never inquired even her name! It was enough for me that I knew her to be everything that is amiable, gentle, patient in woman,—the kindest of mothers—the most devoted of wives. In what way the book, which appears to have constituted my ground of offence, could have interested her feelings, I am wholly at a loss to surmise. But a strange fatality, however, the very same volume proved to be of equal importance in the eyes of persons by a singular coincidence of circumstances highly interesting to myself,—a Mr. Osalez, a man still more widely and more unsatisfactorily known under the name of A. O."

"You have said it!"—exclaimed Verelst, almost shuddering.

"What have I said?" inquired the astonished Basil.

"You have named the man by whose vindictive persecutions the heart of my poor wife was broken!"

"Persecutions!"—exclaimed Annesley, "Surely, surely you must be mistaken!—Chance has brought me somewhat familiarly acquainted with this singular individual; and as far as my observation and experience reach, I have found him the enemy only of his own comfort; generous to others,—to himself alone parsimonious; and even then, wilfully and waywardly,—as if in vengeance or atonement!"

"What should you know of him compared with my poor Rachael?" faltered the artist, much agitated by recurrence to the subject evidently so painful. "How should chance have taught you more of his character and motives than is known to her?"

"Pardon me!"—replied Basil. "Circumstances which I will hereafter explain to you, make it evident to me that it is Mr. Osalez who, by a liberal expenditure of time, trouble, and money, has been the means of bringing to light those impositions so injurious to your prospects as an artist, which have been recently exposed in the newspapers. It was my intention, had you not visited me to-night, to take an early opportunity of apprizing you of the fact."

"I am aware of it," replied Verelst, coldly. "The Marquis of —, by whose munificent patronage I have been enabled to discharge my obligations towards you, informed me that it was to Mr. Osalez he was indebted for his knowledge of my address. But since acquainted with it,—since himself resident in this country, and aware that my unfortunate family had been driven hither for refuge,—what but the most cruel and revengeful obduracy prevented his offering the rums from his table to appease the hunger of his nearest kindred?"

Basil Annesley started from his seat to listen!

"Even if disposed to persist in his animosities against myself," resumed Verelst, "what pretext was there for withholding from his poor sister the aid that might have assuaged the pangs of sickness, and relieved the anxieties of a mother trembling for the destiny of her girls!"

Pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate,—Basil could now only falter, "Sister!—Mrs. Verelst sister to the notorious,—the infamous A. O.!"

Verelst appeared surprised in his turn.

"A few minutes ago," remonstrated the artist, "you were advocating his cause!—You even assured me that chance had brought you familiarly acquainted with circumstances inspiring high respect for his character?"

"I repeat it—"

"Yet you apply to his name such reckless epithets as infamous and notorious!" interrupted the artist.

"Say rather to his *calling*!" retorted Basil Annesley.

"In commercial England, you have surely little right to despise it!"—observed Verelst, in some amazement.

"Commercial England has her fair and legitimate modes for the disposal of Capital,"—observed Basil, somewhat nettled.

"I had always fancied that Exchange speculators, so long as prosperous, occupied an important position in the monied world!" replied Verelst. "Without them, how are the finances of kingdoms to be carried on? The father and grand-father of my wife were the wealthiest merchants in Cadiz. Osalez, prospered by the advantages of an English education, entertained higher ambitions. On the death of his father, he gathered together his enormous capital, and renouncing the hazards of commerce, attempted a career which, but for the accident of his singular personal disappointments, might have sufficed for his happiness. Of that period of his life, alas! it becomes me not to speak; but when enabled, later, to resume his position in society, it was surely insufficient to couple his unblemished name with such epithets as 'notorious' or 'infamous,' that it became one of the most accredited and widely known of those which convulse the Stock Exchanges of the various capitals of Europe?"

"Some of the first financiers and most respected men in the country, have been stockbrokers," cried Basil. "But a Money-lender,—an advertising Money-lender!"

"How mean you?"—cried Verelst, growing pale in his turn.

"The money that now lies so unsatisfactorily before me," observed Basil, "enables me to inform you without further scruples of delicacy, that I should have been exposed to some personal difficulty by the payment of the bills I accepted in your favor, but for having raised the sum in demand by the assistance of a common usurer,—whom I then believed to be a Jew, and knew only by his ill-repute in the world,—under the opprobrious name of A. O.!"

"And these inconveniencies—this hazard you incurred so generously for our sake!"—cried the artist, seizing his hand, and losing all interest in the disclosure more immediately concerning his family, on discovering the real amount of his obligation to Basil. "Fool that I was!—How little, how very little did I conjecture the truth!—I fancied that you were obliging me out of the overflowings of an abundant fortune,—and even then, was grateful!—But that you should have hazarded for our sake the shame of the spendthrift,—the cares of the prodigal!—That you should have been forced into contact with the vile and degraded. Ah! Basil—oh! Mr. Annesley!—this touches me to the quick!"

And reading in the expression of his young friend's countenance a degree of emotion almost equal to his own, Verelst, without further effort to contain his feelings, threw himself upon the shoulder of Annesley and wept like a child.

"And we presumed to find fault with you?"—faltered the artist, raising his head after some moments of absorbing agitation. "We dared to condemn you!—to call you proud,—to suspect you of an intention to offend and insult us!"

"You cannot surely have been so unjust!" cried Basil, starting from his embrace. "Surely your wife—your daughters—"

"My wife could place no other interpretation upon your conduct in suddenly placing before her a book, formerly the property of, and bearing the names of her father and brother; by the former of whom she had been cast off on account of her improvident marriage,—by the latter of whom she was visited with still bitterer perseverance of vengeance."

"I have only to reiterate my assurances that I had not the most remote suspicion of the nature of the inscription or the meaning of the initials,"—said Annesley; "and that I borrowed the work from my mother's library, with no other object than to afford you entertainment. How it even came there, must be the subject of close and, I fear, vexatious inquiry hereafter. Very little, alas! did I surmise your kinsmanship with a man so disgraced in the eyes of the world as the individual whose initials (as I then supposed by the effect of chance) were inscribed therein."

"And yet," said Verelst, "you assure me that you were aware of the interposition of Osalez in my professional career?"

"Still, believing you to be utter strangers to each other!—I fancied he was interesting himself in your behalf, as he would have done in that of any other man of genius lying under the scourge of evil fortune. But advantageously as I am prepared to think of Abednego in comparison with those who judge him only as a Jew,—a miser,—an extortioner,—there are revolting mysteries both in his character and circumstances, which I am wholly unable to solve. The more I ponder on all I know of him, the more I become perplexed by that which I am unable to understand. At one moment, I believe him to be one of the greatest,—at another, the meanest of human beings. In him all extremes appear united:—opulence and penury,—generosity and baseness,—enlightenment and ignorance,—liberality and prejudice,—tenderness and brutality!—How am I to reconcile all this?"

"But during the intimate intercourse you appear to have held together," demanded the artist, "did Osalez never become aware of your interest in my professional fortunes?—Nor give you to understand the bond of kindred blood uniting him with my wife?"

"Never!—never in the slightest degree!" cried Basil Annesley. "Yet, now I think of it, I remember hearing him refer to your position as an indigent artist: a proof that the misfortunes of his excellent sister must have been fully known to him."

"Till within a few weeks," observed Verelst, "we were utterly ignorant of his social position in this country; and aware of his antipathy, and dreading further persecution at his hands, my wife had not courage to address him with representations of the abject nature of our own."

"It was, thanks to that very picture-dealer whose knavery has been the means of presenting me to the Marquis of —, (from whom I have already received orders that will keep my easel in full activity for years to come, and at a rate of remuneration exceeding my most enthusiastic anticipations,)—I had grounds for conjecturing that a picture of mine,—a design from the 'Notre Dame' of Victor Hugo,—had fallen into the hands of the wealthy brother of my wife. Even then, I knew not his abode,—I perceived not his riches and consequence. Nay, I believed him to have fallen considerably from his high estate, till apprized yesterday, by my noble patron, of his prosperity. Little did his lordship imagine when apologising to me at his breakfast-table this morning, for the absence of the enlightened patron of the arts to whom he was indebted for his knowledge of my works, that he was talking to me of a brother!"

"More irreconcilable incongruities!"—exclaimed Basil, greatly depressed by his discovery of a connexion which he knew would be more fatal to the interests of his affection, with his mother, than than the fact that his beloved Esther was a teacher, and the daughter of an artist,—inasmuch as a mere remote allusion to Jewish partialities, had been the cause of driving Lady Annesley to frantic exasperation.

"That very picture of the Esmeralda," resumed the artist, "affords further proof of the contrariety and eccentricity of character of poor

Osalez:—nay, but for my certainty of his infirmities of mind, I should be wholly unable to account for such inconsistency. While avoiding or injuring his sister and her family, he was induced, it seems, to give hundreds of pounds for a work of inconsiderable merit, simply because the principal figure is a likeness of his once-loved Rachael!"

"Far more so of her daughter," added Basil, in a lower voice.

"You knew not my dear wife in her days of youth and beauty!" faltered the artist. "The patient invalid,—the smiling drudge—the humble artist's wife; presents but a poor shadow of the worshipped, the lovely, the triumphant Senora Osalez, who could not pass from her father's carriage to the steps of the church or theatre, but the idlers of Cadiz crowded to feast their eyes on her more than oriental beauty,—endowed as she was with the intelligence and accomplishments of Europe, yet glowing with the riper tints of the sunny South."

"I have seen all this, sir, in your daughters," again hesitated Basil.

"Esther and Salome are lovely girls, as well as the most duteous of daughters," observed Verelst, with deep feeling; "but neither the one nor the other of them deserves comparison with her mother at the period when she forsook the gorgeous mansion of her father, to become the bride of the enthusiastic German artist, who dedicated to her beauty every impulse of a fervid soul, and had, alas! nought beside to offer to her acceptance. The Marquis informs me," added Verelst, after a long pause, during which he seemed laboring to overcome the struggle of his feelings,—“that large as was the price given by Osalez for my Esmeralda, he has offered him double the money to part with it, but in vain. I cannot help fancying that, in spite of his apparent indifference to his sister's welfare, Abednego was unwilling her portrait should pass into the hands of a stranger."

"That can hardly have been the case," observed Basil, fancying he was about to flatter the self-love of the artist. "On the contrary, it must have been the intrinsic value he discerned in the execution of the picture, that rendered him so tenacious; since it was from his own hands, and as a free gift, that I obtained this copy."

While thus explaining himself, Basil drew forth from his bosom where, by day and night, it was fondly treasured, his enamel copy of the Esmeralda!

"What means this?"—cried the astonished Verelst, regarding at first sight the miniature in no other light than a portrait of his wife. "Say,—say!—what means this?—The likeness of my poor Rachael in your possession?"

The explanations rendered necessary by the emotion of Verelst, aroused Basil Annesley to a sense of his own imprudence. It was impossible to give a coloring to his singular value for that lovely face, otherwise than startling to the painter.

"And you have been wearing it thus, then,—wearing it next your heart—wearing it as we treasure only the gift of affection, the pledge of fidelity!" cried Verelst; "and all the while we were accusing you of an intent to mortify us,—of coldness,—of—"

"Spare, spare me these vexatious truths!" cried Basil, eagerly.

"To you," resumed Verelst, after having hurriedly examined the beautiful execution of the miniature, (and noticed how singularly it recalled the features of those who were dearest to him, even while realizing one of the brightest creations of the magic of romance,) "to you it doubtless serves to retrace, in combination, both young and old of the grateful family of the artist on whom you have conferred such generous obligations."

Basil Annesley struggled for a moment with his feelings. However afraid of alarming the pride and susceptibility of Verelst, he would not submit to such a misconstruction of his sentiments. He satisfied himself however, by adding in a subdued voice—"It serves at least to recall to me the face which unites in my estimation all that is fairest, holiest, and dearest in human nature."

The simple artist listened with delight, but wholly without enlightenment. It seemed to him the most natural thing in the world, that his old pupil, his generous friend, should love Esther and Salome, and pronounce them dear and holy,—they, whom he had known as children and appreciated in their womanly discharge of filial duty.—But that he should love either of them singly and separately, or one of them more than the other, never occurred to poor Verelst!

"You have received a commission then, from the Marquis?" inquired Annesley, by way of giving a new turn to the conversation.

"A commission that delights me!" cried the painter with enthusiasm; "for it will enable me to realize my highest ambitions!—I am to paint in fresco the new gallery of his castle in the North;—a series of designs from the English history!—For this, by the way, I must read as well as paint."

"But by such an engagement, you will be compelled to remove your whole family from town!" cried Basil, in a tone of consternation, on beholding his newly-created castles-in-the-air precipitated in a moment to the ground. "Under such circumstances you will stand in need of funds previous to receiving the remuneration due to you; and I earnestly entreat you, as a friend on whom you have conferred obligations, and who has consequently a claim to priority of service in return, to appropriate the notes you have forced upon me to your own use. At some future time, when you become rich, (as you now cannot fail to do,) you shall pay the money back to me. I promise

you that it will be an act of charity so to secure it; for nearly a year will elapse before it becomes due to A. O., from whom I borrowed it on interest; and in the interim, if lying idle in my hands, it might lead me into a thousand scrapes. It might teach me to become a prodigal,—a gambler,—a coxcomb,—heaven knows what!—Money, you know, my dear Verelst, is the corrupter of all human hearts!"

"An axiom of the truth of which my own experience, heaven knows, has availed little to persuade me!"—said the poor artist, with a bitter smile. "Your arguments, my dear Mr. Annesley, are kind as they are specious. But my noble patron has rendered your assistance needless. Aware of the difficulties to be encountered by a poor painter of historical pictures, in such matter-of-fact days as the present, he has generously presented me with a couple of hundred pounds in advance. I am rich, my dear young friend,—rich,—rich,—I was about to say rich as a Jew—but that the word is in utter distaste in my family! Trust me, I am fully enabled to remove them all to the North in ease and comfort."

"But surely," cried Basil, horror-struck at such a prospect, "surely so long a journey, with such uncertain prospects at the close, will be disadvantageous to poor Mrs. Verelst, whose infirm state appears to demand the utmost care and consideration?"

"Rachael would suffer twenty times as much, my dear sir, by separation from her husband. As to accommodations, the Marquis has assigned to our use a suite of apartments in the castle."

Here was a new source of anxiety for Basil!—Esther,—his own Esther, exposed to the injurious admiration which her beauty must necessarily call forth in such a house!

"Surely," said he, attempting a new line of argument, "such an interruption to the engagements of the Miss Verelsts—"

"Engagements?"—interrupted the proud father, with enthusiasm. "You surely do not suppose that, now I am able to earn bread for them, I will allow them to waste their precocious talents in teaching idiotic children or languid Misses?—No, no, no!—No more engagements for my girls!—It is one of my chief sources of joy and triumph on this occasion, that henceforward those dear children may live for the enjoyment of life,—for the embellishment of life,—for the delight of others, as ever, ever, of their fond and happy parents!—No, no!—No more engagements for Salome and Esther Verelst."

This intelligence, so fatal to the hopes which the young man had formed since his reconciliation with Verelst, moved him to silence.

Shocked by his sudden change of countenance, Verelst was starting forward with inquiries into the nature of his seizure, when at that moment the door opened;—and, unannounced and unaccompanied, there appeared on the threshold the striking figure of—A. O.!

CHAPTER XIV.

It was now the turn of Verelst to change countenance; and a succession of strong emotions were rapidly portrayed on the open physiognomy of the painter, incapable of artifice or disguise. Surprise, vexation, satisfaction, perplexity,—obtained, by turns the mastery. There were tears in his large grey eyes;—there was determination in the lines surrounding the firmer and more expressive mouth.

His brother-in-law, on the other hand, betrayed not the slightest touch of feeling. Master of himself, hardened to habits of dissimulation, whatever emotions might be swelling in his heart, the countenance of Abednego was undisturbed. Though apprized that Basil was engaged with Verelst, he had still sought the interview. Nay, it soon became apparent that his visit was produced by the expectation of finding his brother-in-law with his young friend.

On recovering from the shock occasioned by his sudden entrance, Verelst, while Osalez gave his hand to young Annesley, (who, depressed and desperate, was scarcely sensible to his mode of salutation,) had snatched his hat and was preparing to quit the room. But the unwelcome guest interposed ere he could reach the door.

"Hear me before you go!" said Osalez, in a firm voice. "I came hither for the express purpose of meeting you. In the presence of a mutual friend was a fit spot for our interview."

It was now the turn of Verelst to exhibit composure!

"Had I been aware of your intentions," said he, coldly, "I would certainly have deferred my visit to Mr. Annesley till a future moment."

"You could not!" was the cool reply of Osalez. "It would have been impossible for you to sleep this night, with a sum of money in your possession which you knew to be the property of yonder boy. I know ye both!—The same hot-headed enthusiasm that prompted him to pledge his name, his peace of mind, his narrow income, to a Money-lender, to obtain the means of obliging you, would render it impossible for you to close your eyes, while unnecessarily remaining his debtor."

"I have, I find, to thank you for the means of repaying him," observed Verelst, somewhat softened—"For that favor, accept my acknowledgments. But it does not, it cannot efface from my recollection your long neglect and unkindness towards the most deserving of women. Farewell!—Against you we cherish no resentment; but there can be neither love nor amity between thine and mine."

"Thine are mine!" replied Abednego, neither abashed nor dismayed by these bitter reproaches. "Resist as we may the dictates

of nature, the ocean can no more dis sever from its waves an offending drop, than your wife and children expel from their veins the blood that is kindred with my own."

"Neither are we the first of those so conjoined by nature," interrupted Verelst, "who have converted kindred blood to drops of gall! Again I say, therefore, accept my thanks and my farewell. Between persons so closely united, it must be peace or war. With others there might exist a medium of lukewarm good-will,—with us there must be love or hatred!"

"I want no medium," said Osalez, still preventing his departure, and with such steadiness, that Basil Annesley, deeply interested in the discussion, was driven to despair by the sturdy perseverance of Verelst. "There must be love between us,—there must be peace!—Never too late for peace. Your friend here will tell you," he continued, glancing towards Basil, "that I have recently wrestled, face to face, with Death. At such a moment the truths to which, in health and amid the contentions and struggles of life, we close our ears and eyes, speak trumpet-tongued to the Soul, and reveal their dread decree in characters as legible as those manifested in warning to Belshazzar. I have sinned against you, Verelst.—I have suffered vindictive feelings, and resentment of a single injury, to efface from my bosom those hallowed ties of affection vouchsafed by the Almighty for the solace and consecration of human life.—I have allowed your officious interposition in my affairs to steel my heart against the sufferings of a once-loved sister and the children she has born to you.—In this, I have greatly offended, and I therefore seek you, in all Christian humility, to acknowledge my fault and entreat the favor of your forgiveness."

Utterly thrown off his guard by this singular self-abasement on the part of the haughty and obdurate Abednego, Verelst was so far softened as to hesitate. But a moment's consideration brought before him anew the years of suffering and privation endured by his excellent wife and lovely children; and again, he hardened his heart, and put forth no answering token to the extended hand of Osalez.

"You have my full forgiveness," said he.—"Friendship is not a thing to start into life spontaneously, on the slight demand of a converted enemy. The wrongs of my family forbid me to say more:—the sense of what is due to your tardy repentance to concede less."

Once more the agitated artist made a movement to depart. But Basil Annesley now interposed.

"My dear Verelst!" cried he—"it is you who are now exhibiting a vindictive spirit. How—how can you allow yourself to torture a nature so beneficent, so cordial as your own,—in order to assume feelings of animosity, which, even if they existed, should be disarmed by the frank and fervent manner in which the olive-branch is extended towards you—"

"If you only knew, my dear young friend," cried the painter,— "what a series—"

"I know, and seek to know nothing on the subject of your quarrel!" hastily interrupted Basil. "But *this* I know,—that half the quarrels and half the resentments of this world, arise from misunderstandings, which a few reasonable words would suffice to clear up."

"In this case all is perfectly understood," replied the artist, coldly;—"nor are we children, to obey the impulses of momentary passion.—Both have brooded upon our wrongs, till mutual hatred has been engendered."

"If engendered,—on one side, it has been bitterly atoned,—on the other, bitterly repented," rejoined Osalez, with tears in his eyes.

"My dear Verelst!" cried Basil Annesley, deeply moved by witnessing such profound emotion on the part of men of advanced years,— "half an hour ago, you were pleased to express towards me feelings of gratitude and regard. If I have ever served you, and you wish to mark your sense of obligation, I beseech you do it at once, and efface all trace forever,—by accepting the hand which I see trembling with eagerness to enclasp your own!" At this appeal, Verelst, for the first time, turned his eyes full upon his brother-in-law: and either the traces of time and care perceptible in his broken frame and withered countenance, or the manifestation of emotions which Abednego was at no pains to conceal, softened the obduracy of the indignant husband; for, on finding the hand of Osalez placed in his, a moment afterwards, by Basil Annesley, he no longer persisted in rejection. At one moment, both gave a loose to the long-restrained promptings of nature; and the "iron tears of Pluto's cheek" were emulated in those that fell profusely from beneath the shaggy eyebrows of A. O.

Basil was about to retire to the adjoining room, leaving the two brothers to a more copious mutual explanation. But Osalez prevented him. "Nay," said he,— "you are as if of our own flesh. Tarry and hear all!—I have no secrets,—I wish to have none from you."

Amid all his struggles of feeling, Basil could scarcely refrain from a smile! To hear A. O. boasting of having no secrets from him!—A. O. whose whole life was a mystery,—whose right hand knew not the doings of the left!—A. O., who concentrated in his own person half a-dozen separate existences, and unaccordant fortunes!

"I would fain have taken steps towards this reconciliation, many months ago,—from the moment of my first acquaintance with this improvident boy, your friend Annesley," resumed Osalez, when at

length confidentially seated beside Verelst on the sofa, (having resumed his own self-possession long before the simple artist had ceased to sob like a child,)—"but that I did not choose to approach as a benefactor the man I wished to conciliate as a brother. I wished you to be independent in circumstances,—rich through your own talents and endowments,—before I addressed myself to you with overtures of good-will, of which the necessities of your family might seem to compel your acceptance. We have now met upon equal ground; and you have granted me your forgiveness, as a Christian and a kinsman, without forfeiting your self-respect. All is as it should be!—I have taken every precaution to spare your pride as well as promote my own interest in your affection. And now, tell me—when will you propose a visit from me to my sister? In her infirm condition, we must beware of producing agitation,—more especially on the eve of a long journey,—if, indeed, after our mutual explanations, you persist in fulfilling your engagements to the Marquis."

"I will speak to Rachael this very night," replied Verelst,— "but calmly and cautiously. It will require time to prepare her for so trying an interview. Years of hardship,—the loss of several children, which she attributes to the same cause,—and positive ailments arising from those united causes, have so altered my poor wife, that the greatest precaution is indispensable. She is so changed that you will not know her."

"I have been many times in her presence within these last few months," said Osalez, with a smile.

"You are mistaken—quite mistaken!" eagerly rejoined the artist.—"She never quits the house. Ask Mr. Annesley!—She never leaves even her own room!"

"It was *there* our interview took place," calmly rejoined Abednego.

"Mistaken,—mistaken!" persisted Verelst with a smile,—gently shaking his head. "I promise you that you would not know poor Rachael were you to meet!"

"She is far less changed, however, than myself," replied Osalez;—"since, when we *did* meet, I recognised her perfectly; while *she*, addressed me as a stranger!—Do you remember the person who fetched from your rooms the two battle-pieces sold by the scoundrel Stubbs to the Duke of Rochester?"

Verelst paused a moment, for consideration.

"Perfectly," said he, at length. "But *that* was an old Jew?"

"It was myself."

The artist replied by an incredulous smile.

"Do you recollect, that when you received the three five-pound notes for which you had sold the pictures, or rather, in consideration of which you had been robbed of them by the knavish dealer—you bade him inform Mr. Stubbs that the original design of the Battle of the Standard was still in your hands, having withdrawn it from your series of military sketches, as the ground work of the picture in question, and produced at the suggestion of a dear friend?"

"Which *dear* friend was, I trust, myself?" gaily interrupted Basil.

"But *you* were not,—you *cannot* have been that filthy old Jew?" cried the artist, in utter amazement.

"You have seen me more than once in disguises equally unseemly," replied Osalez, undisturbed. "For years past I have placed a great gulph betwixt myself and what is called the world; and when once we hazard so bold a step as to fling off the bond of fellowship with our brethren, we require the creation of prodigious interests, and excitements indeed strong, to fill up the vacuum. I have long been at war with mankind,—as long as they were previously my enemies. Out of my sixty years, for thirty did I support their injustice; and during the last thirty I have revenged myself! But he who fights single-handed against society, must multiply the guises under which he wields his weapons; and shrink from no means or measures by which he can strengthen his cause. For such explanations, however, we shall find a time hereafter. Enough that you promise me to prepare my poor dear sister to receive me. Basil Annesley will apprise me of your success; or better still, conduct you to my abode. The way to yours I learnt from *him*; few people, I suspect, are better acquainted with it."

The young soldier colored deeply at this hazardous allusion.

"I was not aware," said he, "of having mentioned to you the address of Mr. Verelst."

"It was from your pictures, which I found in the hands of Stubbs and others," replied Abednego, addressing Verelst, rather than replying to his host, "that I became aware of your being a resident in this country. But you may imagine with what care and cunning these knaves guarded the scent, so long as you remained a dupe in their avaricious hands."

"And it was my good friend Mr. Annesley, then, who did me this further service," exclaimed the painter, warmly.

"Indirectly. I was anxious to know the object of a certain levy of money which he effected through my means; and since, whether as Osalez the Cræsus, or as A. O. the Money-lender, (who created Osalez the Cræsus,) I have the means of investigating and comparing all the secrets of the two money markets, (the great and the small,) I had no difficulty in discovering that the acceptances he had to meet were in favor of one Gerard Verelst, a painter living near South Audley-street. The rest was readily ascertained,—the minia-

ture I presented to him affords sufficient proof how soon and how thoroughly I made myself master of the secrets of the family."

Basil Annesley gasped for breath. There was no guessing where the indiscreet revelations of Abednego might stop.

"And now," said he, regardless of the embarrassment he had created, "I must wish you good night. Though I have found time to say much that may have appeared to one or both of you superfluous, I am in the greatest haste and some anxiety. I have business to transact before midnight, that dearly concerns the happiness of a family whose ruin,—whatever I may do to avert the fatal crash,—will ere long produce nearly as much sensation in the bedlam called the *beau monde*, as that of the Duke of Rochester. I should leave these Maitlands, in fact, to the consequences of their folly, but that one of the girls has managed to soften my old heart by the eager interest she takes in the fortunes of a certain brother officer of her brother, named Basil Annesley."

"Is all up then with Lord Maitland?" demanded Basil in a tone of regret, without noticing his allusion.

"His bills have been hawking about the town this year past," replied A. O., with one of his former sarcastic smiles. "Her ladyship is at Almacks, while her signature is in the hands of the Jews."

After a few more bitter allusions to the improvidence of the family, he was gone; nor did Basil much regret that Verelst, in his eagerness to communicate to his family the singular reconciliation which had taken place, instantly followed. When the artist had taken his departure, his young friend picked up from the floor the three hundred pound notes which, amid the varied interests of the foregoing conversation, had fallen unnoticed to the ground.

"Would any one imagine," said he, with a mournful smile, as he placed them in his desk, "how short a time has elapsed since the possession of these notes appeared to be a matter of life and death? And would not any one believe that, instead of the beggarly fellow I am, I had the wealth of the Indies, or of Abednego Osalez, at my command! But, alas! what further care have I for money? Verelst is now prosperous. As to my poor mother, though straightened in means, her pride is so much greater than her poverty, that I am convinced she prefers dispensing with the luxuries of life to being indebted for them to any mortal living,—even to her son!"

As these reflections arose in his mind, he recalled with surprise the half-forgotten fact of her being in possession of a book of a peculiar nature, which Verelst stated to have been the property of his wife's father and brother. By what possible concatenation of events was this to be accounted for? Once more, he was compelled to ask himself, through what fortuitous chain of incidents the daughter of Lord L—, and widow of Sir Bernard Annesley, could have been brought into connection with the family of A. O.?

Summer was at hand, and he resolved to make the inviting nature of the weather a pretext for a short visit to Barlingham. The discussions which had already arisen between him and Lady Annesley would afford ground for such interrogations as could not fail to throw light upon the mystery. It was time that all relating to Abednego Osalez should be cleared up! He would no longer be silenced like a child. He was resolved to confront the utmost indignation and harshness on the part of the rigid recluse, rather than remain a martyr to the mysteries by which he now felt himself to be encompassed. The more he had achieved towards fathoming their darkness,—the more he seemed involved in new perplexities!

It was, however, an inexpressible comfort to Basil, that his confidence in his old friend was in process of restoration. To find him openly avowing his disguises, and glorying in his eccentricity, was far more satisfactory than to fancy him the confederate of knaves and impostors; and even the certainty of his obstinate estrangement from a sister so worthy as Mrs. Verelst, was nothing in comparison with the pain of supposing him in league with Stubbs the picture-dealer, in a double imposition upon the Duke of Rochester and the unfortunate Verelst.

The first person who accosted Basil Annesley on the following day, as he was about to enter his club, was John Maitland; who, instead of the nod that usually passed between them, surprised him by a sudden and fervent grasp of the hand.

"Come a little way down St. James's-street with me, Nan," said he, hooking his arm into that of Basil, and proceeding with him, leisurely, towards Brooke's. "You are a good fellow," he resumed, as soon as they were out of hearing of Wilberton, and one or two others who were clustered round the door. "Believe me, I feel the full force of our obligations!"

"What obligations?" demanded the astonished Basil.

"Oh! you need not affect ignorance. No occasion to be afraid now of my pleasantries on the subject of A. O. I am as fully aware as you can desire that *such* 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.'—Yesterday afternoon, my dear fellow, my prognostications were fulfilled. There was an execution in our house. A pleasant thing, eh? for her ladyship and the girls, to see bailiffs sitting in the hall!" he continued with a swelling bosom. "However, it is partly their own fault, if that be any comfort! All the blame was not on my father's side—though they choose to place it there!"

"I am heartily sorry,—sincerely sorry," Basil was beginning.

"Come, come! don't talk so like the dowager-colonel!" cried John Maitland; "Carr was heartily sorry—sincerely sorry!—but, hang it, you were better than sorry!"

"What was I, then?" inquired Basil, shrugging his shoulders at the levity of his friend, "for, upon my soul, I have not the least idea!"

"Of course not,—because *you*, forsooth, have not the slightest acquaintance with A. O.! It was not *you* who interceded in behalf of my family! It was not your liking for Lucy, (who by the way is half out of her wits with thankfulness,) which induced you to determine the man whom you will not own as friend or acquaintance, but over whom you have all the influence of a master over a slave, or a Czar or Muscovy over a colonel of Hussars, to come forward once more to my father's relief,—discharge the writ,—and (on condition of his letting the house in Arlington-street, and retiring to Maitland Park,) re-establish the family affairs? Oh, no! It was not by any means *you* who did us this excellent service!"

"As I live and breathe, *no*!" cried Basil Annesley, with such earnestness as to cause his companion to stop short for a moment.—"Had I the power, indeed, I would have done as much, or twice as much for a friend. But I have not a guinea in the world!"

"My dear Nan, it is too late to recommence with this flummery!" cried Maitland, almost angry at his seeming mistrust. "This man, (I beg his pardon, this gentleman—for a gentleman, God knows, he has shown himself to us,) owned to me, in so many words, that he was acting at your instigation; or, more correctly speaking, with a view of affording you pleasure."

"He *has* afforded me sincere pleasure by his liberality," rejoined Basil. "But he must have divined my wishes by preternatural means, for I swear I never expressed them; nor, on my word of honor as a gentleman, have I any claims upon him that could justify my attempting to influence his conduct in the smallest particular."

John Maitland replied by another incredulous smile.—But they had now returned to the Club door.

"Not a word of all this before the others!" was the parting injunction of John Maitland;—a warning altogether superfluous,—for nothing would have induced Basil to advert, in the presence of his brother officers, to any subject even remotely involving mention of a name so repellent as A. O.

Before night, Basil had managed to obtain a week's leave of absence, with the view of accomplishing his visit to Barlingham; and despatched a letter to his mother entreating her sanction to his journey.

The weather was now as fine as London weather ever pretends to be;—for even the height of summer is scarcely so enjoyable in the metropolis as those delicious days of opening May, before the young leaves have found out into what a world of soot and smoke they have budded: but bear their verdure in purity and freshness, like the bright and unsullied countenance of a sinless child. The skies were blue,—the leaves green,—the sparrows chirping gaily in park and square, as if making the most of their time, ere London was covered once more with dust and ashes,—her leaves seared and shrivelled,—her atmosphere obscured. At such a season, it is difficult for the buoyant heart of two and twenty to sink under the pressure of care!

At the instigation of its own pulses, it hopes when hope there is none,—it loves, when prospect of happiness there is none! The spring-tide of life dances wildly and irresistibly within its bosom. No! despair is indeed difficult for the young.

Basil usually disliked being on guard; from the mere restraint of being tied to time and place;—getting up earlier than usual, and being restricted for the day to such pastimes as a lounge in the British Gallery. Unaffected and unpretending, he had no taste for parading himself and his uniform in St. James's street, an appetite that rarely extends beyond the first fortnight of escape from cubhood to ensignhood; during which, a young guardsman is privileged to astonish the waiting-women at Grange's and melt half the Merific Balsam in Willis's shop, with the splendor of his scarlet and gold.

But on the day in question, howbeit the evening before he had congratulated himself on the certainty thus afforded of escape from the visits of Osalez or Verelst, no sooner was he established at St. James's, than he became insupportably irritated by his enthrallment. He was, in fact, burning with desire to know all that was passing under the roof of the artist. For the first time, the brother officers on guard with him found him absent and unsociable. Colonel Loftus, (John Maitland being absent,) had ventured to banter him upon his flirtation with Lucy; and the pain which her manifest partiality was supposed to cause to their friend Blencowe. But the fractiousness of Basil's replies soon convinced them that he was in no mood to be trifled with. They saw that he was thoroughly out of temper.

The first thing intimated to Basil on reaching his lodgings after coming off guard the following morning, was, that Mr. Osalez had called upon him once or twice in the course of the preceding day, manifesting great anxiety to see him.

"And why did you not tell him I was on guard?"—demanded young Annesley; to whom it appeared as easy a matter to pay a visit at St. James's, as at his private residence.

"I did, sir; but the gentleman seemed put out, and muttered something about 'puppies' and 'coxcombs,' which made me think it unlikely he would drive further," replied the prim Mr. Smith.

"He was in his carriage, then?" inquired Basil.

"He was, sir."

"And alone?"

"No, sir. There was another old gentleman with him, whom I could not rightly see. But both of them seemed much disappointed at not finding you."

After receiving this intelligence, Basil, while dressing and breakfasting, resolved to proceed immediately to the house of Osalez.—Something regarding the interests of Verelst might be in agitation, in which his assistance was needful. But to which among the many residences of his Protean friend was he now to address himself?

"As he called in his carriage," mused the young guardsman, "he came, I conclude, in the character of Osalez the financier; and I will therefore hasten to Bernard street."

Having mounted his hack, he proceeded thither in haste; but at the door received, from the now obsequious butler, who delighted to honor all whom his master delighted to receive at his dinner-table, the information that might have been anticipated—"Mr. Osalez had been off to the city these two hours."

"And where am I to find him in the city?" demanded young Annesley; a query that appeared to excite as much amazement in the rotund pantler, as though he had demanded in what quarter of the town he was to look for Westminster Abbey!

"You will find Mr. Osalez, sir, on the Stock Exchange," said he, conceiving that the handsome young gentleman, differing so widely from the usual visitants of that house, must be infirm of intellect.—

"If off 'Change, you will find him at his house of business."

"And where is that?"—incautiously inquired Basil.

The man seemed to draw largely upon the decorum of his calling, in order to refrain from a laugh.

"In the Old Jewry, sir. But you need only mention the name of Mr. Osalez in the city, sir, for any one to show you the way. The first cabman or orange-boy you meet will inform you."

To the city Basil now hurried; and his park hack was probably as much amazed as his master, to find himself wedged between wagons full of puncheons of sugar or bales of dry goods, the gigantic size of which accounted equally for the power of the splendid draught horses and extent of the team in use, which appeared to belong to a world of more colossal dimensions. The stunning rumble of Cheapside, the perpetual motion involving so much of the *utile* and so little of the *dulce* of life, served to excite his wonder how the less practical part of the business, the portion requiring the aid of figures and calculations, could ever be carried on in the midst of such a hubbub!

On turning, however, into the narrow lane suggested to him, at his first inquiry, as containing the house of business of Osalez & Co., he perceived that even the city has its "quiet situations," its "no thoroughfares,"—like the aristocratic Park Place, and St. James's Places, adjoining the parks of the West End. The narrow, dirty, dingy lane was apparently occupied by the warehouses of wholesale trade;—for just as every house of mark in St. James's had formerly its iron extinguisher before the door, to put out the flambeaux of the footmen, every doorway had, in token of distinction, its ponderous iron crane, and the lower windows of the houses were closely boarded. On every door-post was inscribed one or more names, as unaristocratic as "Jacob Grimms & nephew," "Fiskin, brothers," "Danda & Company," without further indication of their calling, names constituting the unostentatious thews and sinews of commercial life; and though little or no traffic was going on, at that hour, in the street, it is probable that a larger amount of capital passed through every one of those shabby doorways in the course of a week, than into any mansion in St. James's Square in the period of a year!

Half-way down the lane, however, was an opening into a small court, which, by calculation, appeared to contain the number indicated to Basil; and having accordingly dismounted and given his horse in charge to a steady-looking old man, who put himself forward for the charge, Basil proceeded through the gorge of a narrow court into a larger one, surrounded by high buildings; one side of which seemed occupied by a handsome old fashioned dwelling-house, and the other by a range of buildings, the basement story of which was appropriated to counting-houses. Of this portion of the mansion, the huge swing-doors seemed in continual vibration to admit or emit a perpetual string of human beings;—the sort of careworn, swallow-cheeked people, who walk with their coats closely buttoned over their pockets, and their blank visages indicating a mind wandering at many miles distance;—whom one recognises at first sight as the children of the tribe of Mammon.

Unnoticed,—for such people proceed straight to their place of rendezvous, without a vacant thought to bestow on auguries of the flight of crows or sight of strange faces,—Basil pushed his way through the swing-doors among the rest; and, after passing a second swing-door, found himself in a vast, sky-lighted chamber, containing, by way of furniture, a large time-piece against the wall, three long ranges of wooden counters, forty wooden stools, and forty

wooden clerks sitting calculating thereupon; each with his parchment-bound ledger before him,—each with the multiplication-table engraved on his soul in characters effacing even those of the tables of the law!

In the centre of the hall, was a single mahogany desk and stool, somewhat loftier than the rest, apparently destined to the use of the high-priest of the temple of Mammon. But it was vacant. Clerks were bustling backwards and forwards, with cheque-books, or pocket-books, or printed papers in their hands; apparently as mechanical in operations involving the disposal of millions, as the time-piece against the wall in admeasurement of the still more valuable currency assigned to its computation. A buzz of whispers, never rising into unbusiness-like tumult, seemed to form a portion of the heated and unsavory atmosphere of the place;—the money shovelled backwards and forwards across the grated pay-counter being of no more account in the eyes of the individuals occupied in promoting its circulation, than barley-sugar in those of the confectioner's boy to whom prohibition has ceased to be irksome.

As usual, when in chase of his extraordinary friend, Basil Annesley found himself among a race of persons with whom he had neither an emotion nor an impulse in common; and after being pushed against, and shuffled aside for a minute or two, by individuals having business to transact, and as careless in their outward man as is usually the case with those who have anything to do in the world, he inquired for Mr. Osalez. The clerk to whom he applied, pointed to the vacant chair, as much as to say, "Can't you use your eyes and perceive that he is absent?"—when Basil, perceiving that his informant was young and beardless, a stripling like himself, moved a few steps towards the swing-doors, and again addressed the inquiry to a grave-looking, middle-aged man, with a bald head, seedy coat, and mourning ring on his little finger;—who was wasting his time in mending his pen, and had the appearance, among his brother clerks, of a heavy coach running against the mails.

On finding himself civilly accosted by a well-dressed stranger, the elderly clerk slipped from beneath the counter, and desiring Basil to follow him, led the way to the extremity of the hall, towards a room divided from it only by a glazed compartment, shaded with green curtains; but containing only another desk with an old silver standish and writing implements, and half a dozen horse-hair chairs.

"I beg your pardon, sir," apologized the dull old clerk,—"*I* fancied Mr. Osalez must be here! He must have just stepped out. He will be back at two. He is always here as the clock strikes two.—Perhaps you will return?—or at least favor me by writing your name for him?"

Basil declined doing either. He felt that he had committed a blunder in following Osalez. He found himself as little at home in that vast establishment, as at the bottom of a gold mine. The place was as little adapted to the confidences he was expecting as the little noisy chamber containing the clockworks of St. Paul's! Angry with himself and the clerk for the time he had wasted, he muttered something about calling again; and hustled his way back again through the hall, when his transit was as little noted as that of one of the motes dancing in the slanting sunbeams straggling through the skylight,—as if in search of some living being on which to confer enjoyment, from the paved open space adjoining the old mansion house, and ruralized by the name of garden, because containing a pump, and an old sycamore, with about as much sap in the trunk as there exists in the copper-tree forming part of the Chatsworth *jets d'eau*.

Having reached once more the narrow opening of the court into the street, Basil was about to remount his horse, the rein of which was offered him with one hand by the old man, while holding out the other for the expected remuneration; when, as he was groping in his pocket for a sixpence, instead of the shilling he would probably have given had his visit been less infructuous, the man whispered in a tone of mysterious confidence, "Vy for you sheek him here, ma tear?"—and lo, after a start of surprise, young Annesley recognized in the decent-looking individual by whom he was addressed, the fellow who, both in Delahaye Street and at Rochester House, had already marked his respectful recognition of the protege of A. O.

"And where should I seek Mr. Osalez, unless at his house of business?"—demanded Basil, angrily.

"He hash more houshes of business than van, two, or dree,"—replied the familiar of Abednego's inquisition.

"Take me to the one where I am most likely to find him, then,—and it shall be worth your while," observed Basil Annesley.

The old man who had been stooping in scornful examination of the minute coin bestowed on him by Annesley, now peered up into his face with a cunning glance, that not even the disappearance of his rusty beard could disguise from being that of the old Jew; and with only a familiar nod of the head by way of signal of acquiescence and intelligence, he now took the head of Basil's horse and preceded him through a tortuous complexity of dirty lanes, in which the stagnant atmosphere seemed imprisoned as in the cell of a felon!

At the close of a ten minutes walk, he paused in a small shabby-street, which, from the unequal form of the buildings, seemed to constitute the rear or outlet of one of greater magnitude, and taking a

key from his pocket, opened a mean looking green door, to which neither knocker nor bell-handle was attached; then, stepping back stealthily to Basil, resumed the rein of his horse.

"Do you suppose that I am going to run my head into an earth so uninviting as *that*?"—cried young Annesley, warmly. "How do I know into what sort of a den of thieves you may be decoying me?"

"Tievesh if ye shoose!" said the Jew, no whit offended. "But the pashage before you, ma tear, leadsh shtraigh where you would find A. O. *Thatsh* all!"

Reassured by his previous knowledge of the old fellow's connexion with Abednego, Basil determined to dare the adventure! Single-handed, he knew himself to be a match for most men; and his strange conductor would scarcely venture to allure into any dangerous resort an officer of the guards, for whom active search would be made in case of disappearance, and who would easily be traced, through the house of business of Osalez, to the suspicious spot. Nevertheless, the entrance to the narrow passage was grim and repelling enough to daunt a bolder adventurer.

Once crossed the threshold, he was rather excited than otherwise, by the mysterious aspect of the spot. But scarcely had he groped a few steps along the dark stone corridor, when the door was clapped too behind him; and he found himself alone in the stone passage, which received light only through small gratings inserted in the doors at either end, as if for the purpose of ventilation. Since it was as easy to attempt further progress, as to return, Basil pushed his way forwards; and on approaching the door at the end, he perceived that near it, the passage widened, so as to form a recess containing a wooden bench; while through the grating, which was on an exact level with his face, voices in eager disputation reached him from within. One of them, at least, was familiar to him—one of them was that of A. O.! The other was a woman's!

On applying his hand to find a latch or opening, he found to his surprise that what he had conceived to be a door, was simply a portion of the passage,—the wooden bench being continued across; and after a moment's reflection, the nature of the apartment within, and of the conversation which he could not forbear overhearing, convinced him that he was simply installed in some hiding-place or observatory,—some Dionysius's ear,—from which the Money-lender was in the habit of exercising his unholy inquisition over his victims previous to a closer encounter! To interrupt such a conversation as was passing in the chamber beyond, with the admission of having been an eavesdropper, would convey mortification to one party, vexation to the other; and Basil felt consequently privileged to abide the result of the interview.

The fragment of discourse that now reached his ears, however it might disgust, afforded him no new insight into the character or conduct of the lady upon whom he was thus forced to play the spy,—being no other than the young Countess of Winterfield. All he had formerly heard to her disadvantage from Abednego, naturally recurred to his mind; and he was consequently less surprised at the tone of harshness and air of contempt openly assumed towards her by the Money-lender.

For it was no longer the well-dressed, well-mannered Osalez who stood before him. There was nothing to recall the distinguished financier,—the enlightened patron of the arts! It was the hard, cautious, calculating old usurer of Soho who occupied a plain arm-chair; opposite to the sofa, whereon, arrayed in all the elegance of fashion, alternately smiling and weeping,—exercising her coquetry as a beauty, and her pathos as a petitioner—sat the unhappy woman, who evidently trusted to the effect of her mingled charms and eloquence, to soften the obdurate heart of—A. O.!

CHAPTER XV.

"But when I tell you," cried the inconsiderate Lady Winterfield, as Basil drew near,—(little suspecting that a third person was within reach, to note the artifices by which she was attempting to recommend herself to the hard heart of the Money-lender,)—"when I tell you that this is the last time I will ever trouble you with an application?"

"You have told me the same thing, Madam, these half a dozen times!" replied, in his coldest and most deliberate voice, the imperturbable Abednego. "I had the honor of assuring you, during the hurried visit you made to town from Brighton, before Christmas, that it would be totally out of my power to accommodate you further. My advances already exceed the value of the jewels deposited."

"Nonsense!—Don't I know the sum of money they cost Lord Winterfield, on our marriage, only five years ago? I have still by me the jeweller's bills, which I can show you!"

"Can you also show me the jeweller's conscience?" retorted Abednego. "Such articles are invariably sold at two-thirds beyond their intrinsic value. To convince you, Madam, of this, so far from making you a further loan, I am most anxious to replace the diamonds in your keeping, on receiving back, with interest, the amount advanced on such security."

"You say this," cried Lady Winterfield, pettishly, "only because you know that it is utterly out of my power to return it. You are aware that nothing but extreme necessity ever compelled me to place

the jewels in your hands; and now, you insult me by wishing to recall a loan you are aware that I cannot repay!—How do you suppose, pray, that I am to obtain such a sum of money?"

"That is your ladyship's affair. When, by your tears and entreaties, you extorted it from me, you assured me that your embarrassments were temporary, and that you would very shortly be able to clear yourself."

"Yes!—of course!—I said all that is usually said to Money-lenders—"

"All that may be usually said to Money-lenders by fashionable Countesses in distress. But I can assure your ladyship, strange as you may think it, that there *are* persons in the world who hold sacred the redemption of their honest word, even when pledged to a Money-lender!—With respect to the extreme necessity you urge as a plea for placing in my hands your family jewels, I must be permitted to say that I have seen your ladyship's establishment, that I have been allowed the honor of entering your ladyship's drawing-room—very different, I admit, from my own," continued A. O., glancing round the cold, wainscoted, unfurnished room, the boards of which were covered with a square of discolored Scotch carpet,—“but equally far from inspiring me with compassion for the destitution of the owner!”

"We are bound, in this world, to keep up the decencies of life due to our position in society!" interrupted the Countess, in a haughty tone.

"I thoroughly agree with your ladyship," was the fearless reply of Abednego,—“and it is precisely for that reason I have it at heart to see the valuables of the Countess of Winterfield removed from the custody of a money-lending Jew.”

His lovely visiter blushed to the temples at this unexpected retort, but more in anger than in sorrow.

"A step lower in the scale of degradation," calmly resumed Abednego, "and they would appear among the unredeemed pledges in a pawn-broker's window. Think of the brilliant Countess of Winterfield presenting herself at Court with duplicates in her pocket!"

"You presume upon my necessities to insult me thus!"—cried the indignant woman, roused by this terrible sentence.

"Necessities, Madam, permit me to observe, wholly of your own creation! I am not unfrequently compelled to witness the woes of my fellow-creatures,—ay, even those of your own sex. But how different is their nature from those of which you complain! Trust me, there are severer pangs in the world than arise from the rumpling of the rose-leaf!—I have seen mothers of families struggling for their children's bread;—I have seen devoted wives beggared by the providence of their husbands, yet exerting themselves diligently, humbly, and silently, to extricate themselves from ruin. Such misfortunes, Madam, and such penury, I respect. Nay, I have known well-born women subject themselves to wretchedness and privation, for the sake of their lovers,—and even *those* I have respected!—But I have neither respect nor pity for the wantonness of waste that purports only the entanglement of frivolous admirers. The display intended to deceive some unhappy dupe into offering you his hand, moves only my contempt. If you must needs have an opera-box, for the young Marquis to sit beside you throughout the evening as throughout the morning,—if you must needs have a succession of showy dresses, to enhance your beauty to secure these dangles,—if you must needs have brilliant equippages to fly about town,—to wander from races to breakfasts,—from Greenwich parties to pic-nics at Ken Wood, (your ladyship perceives that I am tolerably well-versed in your movements!)—have them at other cost than mine!—I have no money to throw away on the maintenance of your follies."

Lady Winterfield started up. Galled beyond endurance by the humiliations thus inflicted upon her, she resolved to obey the harsh injunction of Abednego, and seek assistance elsewhere. But alas! a moments reflection served to remind her that she had already sought it, and in vain;—that she had no resource—no hope—save in the insolent rebuker of her faults. She submitted, therefore,—rendered docile by the iron pressure of necessity. In a moment she subdued her temper, and humbled her pride,—reduced to tameness like the beasts of the field, by the pangs of privation!

"You are most severe upon me," said she, in the pretty coaxing voice that none knew better how to assume when her purpose needed,—“though perhaps not more so than I deserve. But when I assure you, that if you persist in refusing me this five hundred pounds I am utterly ruined—ruined both in fortune and reputation—"

"My refusal will not render your ladyship a shilling poorer than you are now. In what way, therefore, can you charge me with your ruin?"

"You will have, at least, exposed it to the world."

Abednego shrugged his shoulders. "You expose yourself, Madam," said he, by using such arguments.—Once for all, I repeat that you are wasting the substance of others, and of your children, merely to keep up false appearances in the world. So long as you enjoy luxuries which you do not and cannot pay for, you are shining at the cost of your coachmakers, jewellers, milliners, money-lenders,—the abject obligee of humble tradesmen. At this moment—woman and

Countess as you are—you stand before me as an inferior. Though you may be a countess of the realm, and I the vilified A. O.,—I rise above you as a capitalist,—I rise above you as a moralist, in whose hands you have placed weapons of offence."

It was now the turn of Lady Winterfield to shrug her shoulders ; but with impatience rather than contempt.

"Last week," resumed Abednego, careless of the variations of her countenance,—“there came hither to me a woman young and lovely as yourself, who, like yourself, had exceeded her means, and broken her engagements. She came hither to me, not like your ladyship,—hoping to move me to pity by the sight of her loveliness and her affected despair,—she had other arms for the combat : and those arms, Madam, prevailed !—To her I assigned thrice the sum of her original debt, and at my own instigation."

"And of what nature were those arms?"—demanded Lady Winterfield, coloring deeply, and by casting down her eyes, showing that she was prepared for expressions of gallantry and admiration on the part of one whom she loathed like a harpy.

"It avails little to explain," replied Abednego, with an ill-repressed smile of exultation, as he rose from his chair and approached her ; and the blood of Basil Annesley boiled in his veins, and he pressed his knee closer upon the wooden bench, while inclining his eyes towards the grated aperture, "for they are such as it were, perhaps, unbecoming so great a lady as the Countess of Winterfield to put to profit."

"I am willing to use any arms,—make any concession," faltered the fair bankrupt,—a deadly paleness succeeding to her previous flush, as she contemplated the growing audacity of the Money-lender.

Abednego folded his meagre hands carelessly before him, and throwing back his head stood contemplating her from head to foot, with a smile of indescribable expression. It was impossible to behold a more lovely woman ; and the Money-lender gazed upon her as if taking an appraisal of her charms.

"The arms to which I alluded, are not at your ladyship's disposal!" was at length his sarcastic reply. "For they were tears of genuine remorse for an involuntary breach of faith ;—they were the worn and haggard looks which labor and want impose upon the fairest face.—She was a woman of the people, Madam ;—like you, left young, a widow,—like you, with helpless children dependent upon her prudence. She told me—and her mein attested her veracity—that for them she had toiled day and night,—for them abstained from food and rest. But the outlay that was to set her up in business (borrowed of one of the agents of A. O., and at usurious interest,) was still unrepaid. She was still poor, still insolvent, still needing indulgence ; and came hither, like the fashionable Countess of Winterfield, to beg for mercy!"

Greatly relieved, even while writhing under the severe lesson imparted by Abednego, the fashionable spendthrift gasped for breath.

"I granted it!"—resumed the harsh admonitor. "And I granted her also my respect,—almost my affection. The old Money-lender soothed her as a father might have done, and sent her home in peace and comfort to her children.—Yours, Madam, will have less to thank you for !—I will not expose you,—I will not pursue you with the rigor of the law. But I choose to retain in security for the property of mine which you have squandered, the diamonds pledged to me, to that effect ; and without affording you another guinea in extension of the loan,—aware that neither that, nor millions, would impede your ruin and disgrace."

"Then I am lost!" cried Lady Winterfield, losing all her self-possession and unable to restrain her tears,—“Those precious diamonds—"

"Those diamonds, madam, you do well to prize," resumed Abednego. "They were the bridal gift of one who bestowed his heart upon you, confiding in the promise of a fair exterior ; who entrusted his honor to you, believing in the truth of your affections ; who, on his dying bed, bequeathed his children to your care, believing that all his love and confidence could not have been bestowed in vain ! You do well, therefore to prize the tokens of his love !—But, trust me, they are safer in my keeping than in your own!"

"But if I can obtain from some other person upon them," persisted the humbled woman, clasping her hands in intercession, while tears streamed wildly down her cheeks,—“a sufficient amount to repay you what I have borrowed, with the additional sum needful to repair my shattered affairs?"

"You cannot!" interrupted Abednego, "I have weighed them to the uttermost carat ; and the most liberal diamond-merchant could not afford you in purchase within fifty pounds of the sum you have received from myself as a loan. Few better lapidaries in this town than myself!"

"But if you would permit me to try!" persisted the lady, half remonstrating, half wheedling.

"No, madam!" replied the Money-lender, with a significant smile. "You are not to be trusted with such valuable property. I could place those diamonds in the hands of the poor workwoman of whom I spake, with a far more sanguine hope of their safe return, than in those of the Right Honorable Countess of Winterfield!"

"Then nothing remains to me but death!" cried the distracted

lady, throwing back from her face her silken ringlets, intermingled with the filmy drapery of Brussels lace attached to her tiny French bonnet. "May you never live to repent, sir, the injury you have this day inflicted upon me and mine!"

"People rarely give up the ghost a day the sooner for threats of self-destruction," replied the unimpressionable Abednego. "Your ladyship will, I trust, live long,—long enough for retrenchment,—long enough for repentance!"

"Remorseless man!" cried Lady Winterfield, even in the midst of her genuine tears, unable to renounce her habitual affectation.—“Will nothing move your obdurate heart?—Must I implore you on my bended knees?—Must I—"

"Spare yourself these exaggerations, madam," coolly interposed Abednego, "I am too much used to listen to the pourings forth of human passion, not to decide in a moment what feelings are genuine,—what assumed to induce my compassion. Want, madam, possesses an iron key to the innermost recesses of the human heart,—the recesses where eloquence lies glowing, like the lava within the volcano ;—and that key is often turned in my presence. The merchant trembling for his credit,—the soldier for his honor,—the husband for the peace of his fireside,—mothers who would screen the faults of their children,—children tortured by the necessities of their parents,—all these, madam, plead to me in turns, and often plead in vain. Judge, therefore,—since I can resist the manly struggles of an upright man on the verge of bankruptcy,—of a wife agonized by the prospects of an honourable husband's imprisonment and shame,—whether I am likely to be touched by a few graceful attitudes arising from the extortions of a milliner's bill, or the claims of a compounder of fashionable cosmetics?"

Lady Winterfield now started up with an indignation of wounded pride, far more genuine than her attempts at pathos.

"I was a fool," cried she, "to expect from a Money-lender the sentiments of a man! Do not, however, fancy that you will trample upon me with impunity. You may be compelled to restore those jewels by higher authority than mine. My lawyer assures me you are liable to prosecution for usurious practices against me ;—my lawyer assures me you are far more in my power than I in yours. Since you choose to declare war against me, take the consequences. I promise you that with all your vulgar effrontery, you shall have the worst of it."

Abednego smiled sarcastically at this sudden transition from the fine lady to the virago.

"I am almost beginning to feel alarmed, madam," said he. "Suffer me to ring for your carriage. It will be a relief to my terrors, as well as to your emotions."

He rose from his seat as he spoke ; and for a moment, Basil Annesley apprehended that, by one of those effects of legerdemain, (of which he was now beginning to be ever in expectation when dealing with A. O.,) the host and his visiter might find it necessary to invade his retreat to secure egress from the house. But it was not so.—Scarcely had Abednego touched the bell lying on his bureau, when an opposite door was partially thrown open, by a brazen-fronted clerk, (having a pen behind his ear, so admirably fitted to the locality that it seemed to have come with him into the world,) who instantly fixed his hard, light-colored, predial eye scrutinizingly on the lady, as though the habit of officiating for the Money-lender had endowed him with the power of reading in the faces of his clients the success or failure of their mission.

"See this lady to her carriage, Raffles," said Abednego, resuming his usual place at his bureau, with so determined an air of attention to business, as conveyed a sentence of dismissal. "Her ladyship is in haste."

Too proud to exhibit to a low subordinate, probably as impracticable as his employer, the misery gnawing at her heart, Lady Winterfield drew the Brussels lace closer round her face ; and, by an habitual impulse of affectation, lifting her silken pelisse from the ground, as if afraid of contact with the vulgar earth, quitted the room, escorted by her singular esquire ; who, throwing open wide the folding doors, probably in derision, as if to give passage to some august personage, revealed to view beyond, a handsome apartment richly hung with pictures. It was evident, therefore, to Basil that he was ensconced in the unsuspected issue of some substantial residence. Remembering well the sudden apparition of the Money-lender as if emerging from a panel in the wall, when he himself first sought him as a client, he doubted not that some similar den had enabled Abednego to watch and surprise his actions. Indignant at the idea of this treachery, he was not sorry to have retaliated on Osalez, by becoming an unsuspected witness of his privacy, before he gave him warning of his involuntary presence in the trap.

Scarcely had the door closed upon the Countess, when, flinging down the pen by which he had signified his decree of dismissal, he resumed his place in his arm-chair, throwing himself back into it with an expansion of self-indulgence, as if luxuriating in the idea of the torture he had been inflicting. Rubbing his withered hands with an air of exultation, a hearty laugh burst from his leathern cheeks, the hollowness of which thrilled to the marrow the frame of the warm-hearted young auditor.

"Dreadful!" was the shuddering response of Basil to the triumphant laugh of Abednego. But before he had time to pronounce his purposed warning of the presence of an intruder, the opposite door was again thrown open; and Annesley felt instantly revolted by the apprehension that the unfortunate victim of folly and frivolity might be returning for the fruitless renewal of her supplications. It was a relief to him when the bold-faced clerk entered alone.

"And what amount of bribe did the pretty fool offer you by the way, eh! Raffles, to induce you to influence me favorably in her behalf?" demanded Abednego, still chuckling.

"You seem to have an instinctive insight into these matters, sir," said the clerk, with a facetious grin. "Her ladyship offered me ten per cent., if, through you or any other Money-lender, I could effect a levy for her. It was unnecessary to apprise so fine a lady that it is worth your while to pay me so liberal a salary to be honest, that honesty is every way my best policy. Poor soul! I was almost sorry for her on handing her into the spiry-looking turn-out waiting for her opposite to the counting-house door."

"Keep your pity, my good friend, for worthier objects," cried the Money-lender, proceeding to sort some papers on the table beside him. "I have been giving the foolish woman a lesson she will not easily forget. To no purpose, however—a mere waste of eloquence! The moth will singe her silly wings again—nay, probably perish in the flame, the first opportunity."

"Scarce five-and-twenty, to judge by her appearance," cried the confidential clerk, yet already debased by transactions with the Jews. "It is afflicting! It is positively afflicting."

"Her ladyship's bright eyes seem to have wrought the charm upon the man, which they had attempted in vain to work upon the master!" cried Abednego, with a sneer. "You are growing as soft as a bale of cotton, Raffles! Take heed, my man, or you will become unfit for your employment. However, since this cunning hussy seems to have touched your compassion, you shall even carry her the cheque, by means of which I intend to prevent her, not from flinging herself into the Serpentine, or buying two-penny worth of ratsbane,—of either of which feats she has farther purpose than you or I,—but to preserve her already tarnished name from becoming as black as such excess of levity on the part of the mother of a family might well render it. I have intimated to one of her brothers,—a gallant man, to whom her honor is dear—the mad course she is pursuing; and till he arrives in town, am bound to exercise some providence over her destinies."

"You intend, then, sir, to accede to her request for this further loan?" said the clerk, evidently astonished. "You will please to remember, however, that I have duly apprized you that the security is already exceeded."

"I know it!—I know it! Curse the security! Have I not security twice as sterling in her dread of exposure?"

"But if she have not the means of paying, however much exposed?"

"Her family have. The pledge of a name such as hers is as good as diamonds or gold-dust. But what are you grinning at, sir?"

"At all the invectives so uselessly wasted by the Countess, between this chamber and her carriage."

"Ay!—I can imagine the torrent of abuse she let forth against poor A. O. The way with them all! Unless one consent to be fleeced like the rest of their creditors, one becomes dog, curmudgeon, robber, Jew! The poor initials of A. O. have been made the object of more execrations, I suspect, than any other combination of the letters of the alphabet."

"But surely, sir, since you intended to oblige her, you might have spared her the terrible moments of suspense she has had to undergo."

"And the sermon that preceded it, eh! No, no, Raffles! It is because I intended to rescue her out of the jaws of perdition, that I had the courage to reprove. I am too cruel, eh, to these young and tender sinners? I tell you, it were as reasonable to tax the surgeon with cruelty who amputates some gangrened limb to save the life of a patient. But enough of this. Let her have her money by five o'clock. By the way, cash the cheque I have written, as you go along the Strand—which will secure her from the humiliation of presenting the draught of a Money-lender. She will attribute my relenting, of course, to the eloquence wrung out of you by the influence of her ten per cent. Ha! ha! ha! Better so! It would be the ruin of me if I got the reputation of being chicken-hearted. By the way, you have given instructions, I hope, to Cognovit, to proceed against the old Viscount?"

"I have, sir."

"And to make out a writ against—"

Basil Annesley now shouted so loudly as to disturb the equanimity of both the Money-lender and his clerk, for he had no wish to pry more extensively into such transactions as he foresaw were about to be disclosed.

"Who the deuce is in the pigeon-hole?" demanded Abednego.

"It is certainly not the voice of Zebedee!" replied Raffles; and before Basil could reiterate his signal, part of the wall seemed to recede beside him; the moveable panel, dividing the trap from the council-chamber of the Money-lender, being withdrawn.

The confidential clerk instantly collared the skulking stranger.

"Your pistols, sir, your pistols!" shouted Raffles to his superior, "tis some housebreaker—some burglar. I have him fast!"

"Loose him again then, and thank your stars that your noisy zeal has not tempted me into shooting through the head one but for whose aid you would have been now thrown masterless on the world!" cried Abednego, who, having snatched a pistol from his bureau and confronted the open panel, instantly descried through the doubtful light, that it was no other than the young guardsman, who was struggling in the grasp of his deputy.

"I have sought you in many strange places, Mr. Osalez," observed Basil, calmly stepping into the room, on finding himself released, "and found you sometimes in others equally strange, where your presence was wholly unlooked-for. On the present occasion, I had no intention of becoming a spy upon your actions. Though in search of you and at your own desire—I swear to you that I knew not, when I was thrust into yonder disgraceful cell, to what sort of retreat I was proceeding."

"No need of an oath to confirm your statement!" replied A. O., not in the slightest degree embarrassed; "since, unless favored by the pass-key of one of my agents, it had been impossible for you to wind your way into one of the most secret of my places of resort. Nevertheless, since you are beginning to affect compunctions of conscience about visiting the den of a Money-lender, it may not be amiss to remind you that, once upon a time, a certain Mr. Basil Annesley—"

"Visited, on a similar errand, a certain A. O.!" replied the involuntary spy. "But I came not *then* as a friend—I came not, as now, to—"

"You came *then*, PRECISELY upon the same errand as *now*!" retorted Abednego, firmly. "You came, and come, in the hopes of benefiting Verelst. Nay, wherefore deny it? Can you exhibit a better passport to my regard than solicitude for the welfare of my sister's family?"

The astonished clerk lost for a moment his professional air of callous effrontery, in utter amazement—first, at hearing the old Money-lender address, in a tone of affectionate interest, a well-dressed young man of Basil's manners and appearance; and secondly, at an avowal of kinsmanship with any mortal living on the part of A. O., whom he had hitherto regarded as an insulated being—a sort of mysterious automaton composed of gold and arithmetic, who was equally likely to have emerged from the Great Pyramid or from St. Giles's Charity School, so utterly disconnected did he appear from the ordinary associations of life. It was highly mortifying to the astonished and inquisitive Raffles, when, a moment afterwards, Abednego signified his desire to be alone with his handsome young visitor; and, apparently on his guard against the habits of duplicity he had inculcated into his subordinates, followed him gravely across the dining-room as he retreated, and carefully locked the door upon him after his departure; an unmistakeable signal, in that mysterious establishment, that no possible emergency, short of the house being on fire, was to entitle the people of the Money-lender to intrude upon his privacy.

"And now," said Abednego, after returning to the room, and re-installing himself in his sanctum, "seat yourself, I entreat, and let us have a few minutes' unmolested conversation."

"Excuse me," replied Basil, glancing through the still open panel along the dark corridor—"I have left my horse yonder in the street, under the care of an utter stranger—"

"Under the care of one of my confidential agents, or you would not be here!" retorted Abednego. "Fear nothing! Zebedee has something of a taste for horse-flesh. It was him I employed to seize the Duke of Rochester's stud at Newmarket. The fellow will take good care of your hack."

So saying, he closed the panel, by a spring, and came and sat himself down over against Basil, in the arm-chair in which he had mused so exultingly after the departure of the Countess of Winterfield. But with his usual tact of discrimination, he instantaneously discerned the unfavorable impression made on the young man by the scene he had recently witnessed. Young Annesley was cold, unexpansive, uncordial—neither disposed to receive with applause the biting jests of his companion, nor to listen with respect to his homilies. The open-hearted soldier seemed resolved to demonstrate his consciousness of being in the company of a professional Money-lender.

For some minutes, Abednego attempted to wrestle with this sudden mistrust; but finding all his efforts to raise a smile or command attention abortive, he suddenly burst forth into a more genuine strain.

"I see how it is!" cried he. "I have lost your regard—I have lost your friendship. The warm interest of a young heart like yours fell like dew upon my old age, reviving feelings I had never expected to find re-existent in my withered heart; and already the fountain is dried up—the desert again parched. Master as I am of millions that first spontaneous impulse of human sympathy towards me, I prized above them all! And now, you hate me! I see it in your face—I hear it in your voice, or rather in your silence! Do not deny it, Basil Annesley, you are on the verge of loathing and despising the unfortunate A. O.!"

"Unfortunate!" reiterated Basil, with a smile.

"Ay! most unfortunate!" reiterated Abednego. "A victim from

his birth—before his birth—a foredoomed outcast—a predestined paria—a—”

“Pause for a moment, Mr. Osalez,” interposed Basil. “Far be it from me to surprise the secrets of your prison-house. Reflect, I entreat, before you enter into rash confidences which you may be hereafter disposed to repent!”

“No!” cried the Money-lender, his countenance evincing tokens of uncontrollable emotion. “The time is come! I feel that I cannot support the withering weight of your contempt. I must speak or die! I *must* vindicate myself. Let there be, at least, one human being entitled to examine and dispassionately judge the real position and provocations of Abednego Osalez.”

“In that name, Basil, consists the secret of my destinies!” resumed the Money-lender, after a pause—for it is that of—a Jew! incontestably that of a Jew. Comport myself as I may, in accordance with all Christian Canons, though I may fear God and love my neighbor as myself; nay, though, as St. Paul hath it, I give my body to be burned, what profiteth it to me? I bear a Jewish name! My patronymic smells of the Synagogue! I am a Jew—I *must* be a Jew—the world avoucheth it, and who is to gainsay the world? Opinion—vulgar opinion! hath placed me among the children of Israel! Basil Annesley—such is the influence that hath overmastered the impulses of nature; such is the social tyranny that hath made me what I am!

“Listen to my story!”

“I was born—as Verelst has probably informed you—the only son of a wealthy merchant of Cadiz, trading with the whole commercial world, but chiefly with England—my mother, and my father’s mother, being alike natives of that country. It was, in fact, on the marriage of my grandfather with a young Protestant of honorable extraction, a countrywoman of your own, that he renounced the church of his forefathers, thereby entitling himself to all the charities and indulgences of the Christian faith. His recantation was an act of pure conviction; for my grandfather, rich as a Doria or a Medici, was a man of spirit and intelligence; and even the passion he had conceived for the daughter of an English admiral, would not have beguiled him into a capitulation of conscience. By his conversion, he turned, of course, against himself the hands and hearts of his own people. He made enemies of kith and kin. All those in whose veins his blood was flowing soon proved, to him and to the world, that those kindred drops were converted to the bitterness of gall. Had he not a right, however, to conclude that the church to whose bosom he had betaken himself, would strive to heal the wounds inflicted by their malice? Had he not cause to believe, that the newly-converted Christian would be, by Christians, Christianly entreated?”

“It was not so. In Cadiz, where he abided, the people were at that time illiterate bigots; and to the end of his days, my grandfather’s sumptuous mansion was pointed out by the populace as that of ‘Osalez the Jew.’ Had he embraced the Catholic faith, the case might have been different. But the burnt-offerings of his zeal smoked not on the altars of their cathedral, and they consequently persisted in opprobriating him as ‘Osalez the Jew!’”

“Of that time I remember nothing! My grandfather died soon after I saw the light; but I remember overhearing legendary whisperings by our fireside, betwixt his venerable widow and my father, of the times when, on any occasion of popular tumult, it became essential to conciliate the populace by prodigal benefactions, lest they should attack and spoliage in the harbor or on the quays the vessel or merchandise of ‘the Jew of Cadiz.’”

“Was this rational? Has not the God of Christians expressly declared, that there is more joy in Heaven over the sinner that repenteth, than over the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance? And which, I pray you, hath done more for the Christian church—the man who sacrifices the love of kindred, and the predilections and belief of his ancestors, to cling to the Cross—or he to whom a lukewarm faith is transmitted by his forefathers, who accepts it unexamined, yet prospers under the green olive groves of ecclesiastical protection, while the Jewish neophyte is compelled to drag, as a burthen in the dust, the galling weight of that Cross, which he hath voluntarily and zealously adopted?”

“Again I ask, Basil Annesley, is this rational? But when was the population of a priest-ridden country ever rational? My father, who, at his mother’s desire, had been educated in her native country, was deeply affected by the mistrust and evil dealing. In England, therefore, did he linger, even after his education was completed. In England, did he love, and wed, and become a father; nor was it till after my birth, that the sudden death of his father compelled him to return to Cadiz. Fain would he, from that moment, have extricated himself from commercial life—realized his property, and established himself permanently in the land of religious freedom and scientific enlightenment. But it was impossible! His capital was so widely diffused—his foreign connexions (especially with the English colonies in the East) were of so widely spreading a nature—that the remainder of his life was expended in attempting to destroy the root of these ramifications, in order to abjure the merchant craft.

“Nothing more heart-gnawing than the bitterness engendered by consciousness of a defeated purpose. Osalez—‘the son of the Jew,’—though the wealthiest citizen in Cadiz, while his vessels were

hailed in every port of Europe, and while his voice decreed the existence of plenty or famine for hundreds of thousands—was a miserable man. The corn, wine and oil, in his rich warehouses conveyed no food to his soul. In Spain—in Catholic Spain—he seemed to stand aloof from the community, as his father had done before him. He became a widower; and not the poorest of his brother merchants would have been content to bestow his daughter in marriage upon ‘the son of Osalez the Jew!’”

“Again I ask you, Basil Annesley, was this rational? My poor father, fancying that in England—liberal England—such prejudices were unadmitted, still looked forward. The time would come, he fancied, when he should find a successor rich enough to undertake his speculations, and invest millions in his vast undertakings; ‘and then, my boy,’ was ever and ever his cry, ‘then will I set up my staff in the happiest and freest country in the world. England is the land of commerce. There the origin of our opulence will be respected, and the estates, in the purchase of which I intend to sink the greater portion of my capital, will give you a stake in the country entitling you to a voice in its legislation. You shall have a seat in Parliament, Abednego! With your talents, and the education that is to perfect them, you may achieve public distinction, and become the founder of an honorable family. I could almost wish now that I bestowed on you at your baptism a name savoring less of the repellent origin of our ancient house. But when you were christened, the old man my father was yet alive; and I shrunk from inflicting a pang upon his warm heart by appearing ashamed of the name he had inflicted on myself—which was his own, and that of the father of his father. To the unlucky appellation of Abednego I have been myself indebted for half the odium attached in Cadiz to ‘the son of Osalez the Jew.’ Nevertheless, whenever that title of reprobation meets my ear, I think of my father’s grey hairs, and am content; so may it be with yourself! Should you ever have to smart under its contumelious application, recall to mind the motives of your parents, and be patient.

“Such, Basil, were the views of this excellent man in affording me what is esteemed the first of English educations,—at a public school, and the university. He could bear to part with me; for he was again wedded, and the father of a little girl, whom he had piously named Rachael, after the custom of his family.

“I was a smart and forward boy. From my infancy, I had received in my father’s house that best of schooling, the society of the wise and liberal. The table of the rich Osalez was open to all that was enlightened or distinguished in his native city;—the Grand Hidalgos, whom it was so often in his power to oblige,—the Archbishop,—the Governor,—the Commandant,—the noblest and best in the place. The appointments and entertainments of our house were sumptuous as those of the merchant-princes of Italy; and to what level will not the meanness of empty pride descend, for the indulgence of its sensual pleasures!—I quitted Spain for England with the impression that we were a great and powerful family; and that I should find elsewhere, the consideration and obsequiousness I had met with from the guests and dependents of my father.

“The haughty boy was destined to a rough lesson! Shall I ever forget that first week at Eton!—shall I ever outlive the recollection of the swelling heart with which I nightly retired to my pillow, after hearing reiterated around me the opprobrious cry of—‘Abednego the Jew!’ In the course of the first day, not one of my young school-mates but had inquired after my brothers, Shadrach and Meshach. The bed I was moistening with my tears was called the burning fiery furnace;—and not a morsel of my food but was embittered by offers of a slice of pork, or other savory meats the object of Jewish abomination. At length I turned upon my persecutors. Like other badgered schoolboys, I tried, in the first instance, the forces of my puny arm, and fought, and was first beaten in the ring, and then chastised for having fought! I bore all bravely; because my triumphs as a scholar already afforded me a prospect of humiliating my adversaries with the force of higher weapons. I felt greatness struggling within me. My aspiring soul resolved to raise itself above the level of the gibbering lordlings by whom I was despised.—‘They shall hear of me yet—they shall feel me yet!’ was the inward suggestion that spurred on my lagging scholarship, till I became an object of general wonder; my English verses, my proficiency as a Grecian, being equally themes of praise. The masters began to cite me among themselves as a youth of singular promise, likely to distinguish himself in public life. Then came the habitual rejoinder—‘Poor fellow!—with such abilities, it is a thousand pities he should be a Jew.’—‘But he is not a Jew—neither he nor his parents!’ was the indignant retort of the head master. ‘Impossible!—the name!—‘Abednego Osalez!’—Besides, look in his face,—only look at his face!—Eyes,—features,—hair,—there is Jew impressed in every lineament!’

“The first time remarks of this description reached my ear, I recalled to mind, with bitter consciousness, the air of sadness sometimes overspreading my father’s countenance, as he gazed on my own. Often, when addressed by his parasites with laudations of my personal beauty, I had heard him murmur, while they were admiring the Oriental fire of my eyes, or glossy blackness of my hair. ‘Would,

would that he had inherited the northern fairness of his poor mother! My face may prove a disastrous portion for that noble boy!—Prophetic words, Basil,—as the taunts of my school-mates, and more polished irony of my college companions, soon taught me to my cost!

“Still, though wounded and smarting, I was not desperate,—I hated my name,—I detested my origin,—as the source of unjust aspersions; but I did not yet hate the world. Just as my father and grandfather had said, in extenuation of the scoffs and mistrusts of Cadiz,—‘These people are ignorant and priest-ridden; their insolence merits only our pity!’—did I say in my turn,—‘Why heed the sarcasms of boys and striplings?—The award that is to determine my position in life, must be pronounced by men and women!’—But of the spell included in that latter word, Basil, little did I then know to estimate the power!—At Oxford, politics became my favorite study. The burning ambition of my soul was to distinguish myself in Parliament. I doubt whether the most fervent patriot ever panted with fonder desire for an occasion of serving his country, than I for the honors of senatorial renown. I was convinced that on the walls of the House of Commons hung the escutcheon of my future ennoblement. It was there I had to win the laurels destined to replace the absence of an hereditary coronet;—

There, either I must live, or have no life!

“Never, for a moment, did I mistrust the strength of my own powers. Like the Pythoness, I was conscious of the divinity within me. I felt myself to be master of my own destinies, and, through them, of the opinion of the world. It was my ambition only to raise myself to the level of my fellow-creatures; to redeem myself from unmerited obloquy. The desire to set my foot upon the neck of mankind arose in later life. As yet, I dreamed only of what appeared easy of achievement,—and, so long as the illusion lasted, was at peace with myself, and with the world!

“The covert insults that sometimes assailed me, fell unnoticed on my ear. The name I was about to create for myself, would soon, I fancied, obliterate that of Abednego Osalez!

“Alas!—how should I have shuddered—how recoiled with horror—had any one, at that period, presumed to predict to me the humiliating career of the future A. O.!”

CHAPTER XVI.

It was not till after a pause of some minutes, during which the irritation of the Money-lender appeared somewhat soothed by the sympathy and interest manifested in his recital by his young companion, that he resumed, in a less-excited tone and manner.

“Mankind are more what they are made by mankind than what they are made by their Creator!” said Osalez. “The wolf is ferocious because hunted from a whelp. The snake turns upon you because you disturb and pursue it. The child grows surly, because unjustly coerced. But, above all, man becomes unjust and cruel, because pursued with cruelty and injustice by his brother man. I was born imbued with the original sin of human nature: yet certain am I that there were noble purposes in my soul, which the scorn of my fellow creatures converted into wickedness. The germ of goodness was there; but, watered with poison, it brought forth deadly fruits!”

“Full of eagerness,—full of trust in myself and others, I entered into life. My father made me a splendid allowance,—an allowance doubling that of the richest nobleman at the university; and though this told against me in one sense, by the perpetual citation of ‘The rich Osalez—rich—rich as a Jew!’—it enabled me to confer obligations, ensuring me hosts of fashionable associates. For them, I was only ‘Osalez,’—Osalez who had such famous hunters, such capital wine, and such a knowing curricule always at the service of his friends;—and to be my friend was consequently the pretension of half my acquaintance. Those who delighted to dine and drive with me, or rather for me, introduced me to their families; and by degrees I became (on sufferance, though I little suspected it) a favored guest in the *beau monde*. I was happy, young, handsome,—as handsome as the Jewish physiognomy, which my grandfather’s conversion could not efface from our hereditary nature, would permit. I was admired,—flattered,—followed,—nay, fancied myself beloved!”

“And why not?” said Basil Annesley, courteously, fancying that his excited companion paused for the encouragement of a kindly word.

“Why not? Because my name was Abednego,—and because I looked like a Jew! Listen, Basil! I had won the highest honor of the university; and before entering the Parliamentary career, to which, at that period, money secured the entrée, I thought it my duty to visit my father. Would I could adequately describe the rapture with which he welcomed me, and the pride he took in my proficiency! Would you could have seen the passionate admiration of my poor little sister, and the partial kindness of my stepmother! In that household, more splendid than almost any of those I had left in London, I was a demi-god!

“I would fain pass over that epoch of my life!” said Abednego, in a lower voice. “The reminiscences it must awaken, may possibly expose me as a weakling in your eyes. Nevertheless, to enable you to judge my cause,—all—all must be disclosed.

“It was winter, Basil. Leaving my hunters at the disposal of my shallow friends, I hurried to Cadiz, at a season when its climate is peculiarly grateful; and, after long immurement in the murky realm of Great Britain, dear, indeed was my delight in the softness of that southern atmosphere, and the fragrance of its long-forgotten orange bloom. Till then, I had not imagined the intensity of enjoyment which pleasures so purely physical can impart. But they were not purely physical! I enjoyed them so keenly, only because I shared them with another,—another—young, fair, noble, generous,—already dear, and soon to become dearer than my life!

“The family of an English nobleman was passing the winter at Cadiz, for the benefit of the health of an only son, who was supposed to inherit a consumptive tendency. One of his lordship’s daughters—one of his three daughters—

Again Abednego paused; and Basil Annesley, in spite of his eager and growing interest in the narrative, had the forbearance to entreat him once more to desist from his painful task. But at that suggestion, Abednego resumed his firmness.

“Till my arrival at home,” said he, as if assuming a peremptory mastery over his emotions,—“these people—these noble exiles, had been overcome with *ennui*. With the exception of her to whom I have alluded, not one of the family was mentally endowed to find satisfaction in the mere beauties of nature, or the attractions of a strange country. Both father and sisters repined after the pleasures of the fashionable world; hungering and thirsting for news of society,—the gossip of the clubs—the frivolities of aristocratic life;—they welcomed me, therefore, with delight. The splendid entertainments of my father, to whom his lordship had brought letters of introduction as to the first merchant of the city, and in one of whose mansions he was domiciled, assumed a new charm in their eyes. They were constantly in the society of my stepmother, who was a pleasing and accomplished woman; and I,—I who appeared to belong to a world which, as regarded Cadiz, had hitherto been exclusively their own,—was admitted into their circle as a familiar and honored guest.

“How I loved her, Basil Annesley, that youngest and fairest daughter of the house,”—resumed Abednego, after a short pause,—“it matters not now to relate! How she loved me, my utmost protestations would scarcely entitle you to believe! We were of one mind—one heart! So short was our acquaintance ere it ripened into love, and soon into intensest passion, that it were fruitless to detail its progress. We were constantly together. At the opera—in morning promenades,—in marine excursions, the wealth and influence of my father in the city enabled me to enhance and secure their enjoyments; while the presence of the woman of my heart sufficed solely to my own. What a dream it was!—what joy—what madness! Restrained, however, by the presence of her sisters, and, even at her tender age, conscious that I should be an unacceptable suitor to her haughty father, she was the first to propose clandestine meetings. The gardens of our two mansions nearly adjoined; and favored by the climate, we met, as Southern lovers do, by stealth and in the quiet moonlight;—met often, and parted undiscovered. She was already my plighted wife. It needed only her father’s sanction, to make her mine for ever! By her own desire, however, my formal demand for her hand was still delayed.

“‘Your great riches,’ said she, ‘may something avail to smooth down the difficulties likely to arise on the part of my family. Still I foresee that your Jewish name and origin will form an obstacle almost insuperable. Render that name renowned, dearest Osalez, and half the difficulty will be overcome. Distinguish yourself in parliament. Even as contact with the divinity converted a gibbet into the emblem of salvation, the instincts of genius consecrate with distinction the most ignominious origin. Come to my father to claim my hand as one who has commanded the applause of senates, and he will not presume to treat you with the disdain I apprehend!’

“Stung by even the hint of scornful entreatment, my wounded pride stimulated me to fresh exertions: nay, gave me courage to bid her farewell, with a view to a speedier and more auspicious meeting. The family was to be in England early in the summer.—By that time, I doubted not that opportunity would prosper all I meditated. The parliamentary agent employed by my father’s London solicitors had made arrangements for my coming forward for a Government borough, on the creation of a batch of peers, whose patents were already in progress.

“To London, therefore, I hastened; sustained even in the anguish of parting from an object engrossing every feeling of my heart and soul, by the ardent desire to render myself worthy, or rather prove myself worthy of pretending to her hand. Not a moment did I mistrust my own powers. The University had fixed its *imprimatur* on my scholarship; and already the eyes of many were upon me. All I needed, to acquire a position in society, was the passport which parliamentary distinction, more especially at the period of a national crisis, such as was then imminent, rarely fails to confer.

“But alas!—the borough offered to me for purchase, by the inertness or incapacity of my agent, slipped through our hands; and bitter was my disappointment on finding that a week’s delay at Cadiz, conceded to the prayers of that beloved being at the moment of bidding her farewell, had been fatal to our prospects. So far from

realizing the promise I had made her, she would find me on her return to England the same obscure individual who had quitted her; and perhaps hear me rejected by her proud father as 'the grandson of Osalez the Jew!'

"Distracted by this apprehension, and still more by the idea that, should I want courage to make the attempt, some more appropriate match might present itself, which the jealousy of her sisters (with whom she was no favorite, because the favorite of all the world beside) would induce his lordship to press upon her acceptance, I resolved to leave no effort unattempted, however rash, to accomplish my purpose. At that moment, the sudden death of one of the members for a Cathedral town, prospered my views. Aware that my father would consider no expenditure excessive which served our ends, I determined to dare the contest. With money—eloquence—an unblemished character—the chances seemed most auspiciously in my favor. So, at least, I was assured by the solicitors, whose sole object was the augmentation of their bill. They advised me to hurry down to L——, on the assurance of having smoothed my way to the hustings.

"Never shall I forget the elation of my spirits during that journey. I rejoiced at having declined the attendance of the men of business who had proposed bearing me company. For hope was my companion by the way; promising all that can make glad the heart of youth; a happy home, a blessed, beauteous, loving wife—and when tempted forth from my glad fireside, the esteem and honor of my fellow-men.

"Such were my feelings and aspirations, Basil, when, on a bright and sun-shiny afternoon, I entered L——! As I approached the city, the aspect of its population seemed to possess a peculiar interest in my eyes; as the people for whom I was about to exercise the first flow of my intellects and human charities. They were about to be entrusted to my care, as a fold to the shepherd; the constituency over whose welfare I was to be the providence. Do you yet know enough of the world, young sir, to appreciate the absurdity—the vulgarity, of such generous emotions?"

The eager narrator had now worked himself anew into his former excitement; and the low and mournful voice in which, as with a plaintive organ-stop, he had been describing his felicitous dream of early love, gradually gave place to harsh and abrupt impetuosity.

"Well, sir! I entered the city!" he resumed. "You have probably witnessed the triumphal entries of candidates on such flattering occasions? Laurels, ribbons, largesses to the populace, feasting, junketing, music, clamor—all that money can concede or extort from the venal energies of popular nature. Those men of mind, whom we fondly call the people, gave me back with interest the huzzas I had purchased. But on entering the market-place, Basil, and confronting the opposition party, the first object that met my eyes was my own effigy roasting in the midst of a burning fiery furnace; surrounded with placards of 'What Christian will dare to vote for Abednego the Jew?'—'No circumcision!'—'Now Barabbas was a robber!'—with pork griskins stuck on poles—and every other insulting emblem, supposed to be abhorrent to my imputed faith!

"I was irritated—but nothing further. Conscious of the inapplicability of these whips and scorns of vulgar derision, the usual implement of the hustings, I conceived that nothing would be easier than to undeceive the population of L——. In almost every great assemblage reason preponderates: and having in my speech, on the first day's poll, uttered the most solemn denial of my imputed Judaism, and appealed to the support of the ecclesiastical interest of the city, to which I conscientiously pledged my own, I fancied the mischief overcome.

"My eloquence made a manifest sensation. I was cheered by the people, and encouraged by the gentry. But during the night my adversaries got up a farther storm of insult. Placards representing Shyleck, with the knife and scales in his hand, preparing to cut off the pound of flesh, greeted me on emerging from my inn, intermingled with representation of the martyrdom of little St. Hugh, (whose tomb, unfortunately, graced the adjoining cathedral,) the legend of whose barbarous murder by 'the Jew's daughter,' was roared round the hustings by a score of stentorian voices. Every time I opened my lips to address the multitude, I was interrupted with

As it fell out one holiday,
Small rain did fall,—

till the name of St. Hugh of Lincoln, became indeed accursed in my ears!

"The bigotry of Cadiz was pale and tame, in short, compared with that of the cathedral town! Suffice it, that after throwing away thousands of pounds, I lost my election—and far more than my election—my trust in the justice of mankind, nay, the justice of Providence itself.

"I ask you again, Basil Annesley, was it rational that I should be thus reviled and rejected—untried—unheard—and a booby Squire preferred in my place, simply because some wag had written on the walls previous to my nomination, 'What is your name?' 'Abednego!' 'Who gave you that name?' 'The high priest of the synagogue, in my baptism!'

"A thousand crushing thoughts came crowding into my soul

when I re-entered London the following day. I was defeated; and the bitterness of a defeated candidate is proverbial. But never did defeat convey, like mine, extinction of every prospect of distinction—every hope of earthly happiness. Parliament was the Promethean torch that was to endow me with vitality; and the living spark was quenched!

"It was then, Basil, that, for the first time, I learnt to appreciate the value of MONEY! In place of the Providence I was beginning to mistrust, the Molten Calf became my God! I said not to myself, like Lucifer, 'Evil be thou my good!' but 'Gold be thou my guardian angel!' For the solicitors, by whose inaptitude I had been so ill supported, now whispered in my ear, that perhaps they might still be able to purchase a seat; and this time they so far redeemed their word, that, within a fortnight from the silvery whisper reaching my ear, a spendthrift lordling had accepted the Chiltern Hundreds—the credit side of my banker's book was lessened by an item of five thousand pounds—and Abednego Osalez took his seat in the House of Commons.

"And now, Basil, now, my way seemed clear before me! I was a member of the most enlightened legislative assembly in the world, and my reputation was in the keeping of the free press of the land of liberty. Forests of laurels seemed shooting up before me. I anticipated fame—I anticipated popularity—I anticipated, I—Great God!" exclaimed the excited man, interrupting himself; "the flame of joy and triumph that swelled my veins at that moment seems rushing back anew into my heart, warm with all the glowing energies of youth. All the wealth of my bursting coffers was insufficient to requite the enjoyment of one sunny day of the unsullied brightness of that boyish confidence!"

"But surely, in parliament, the unjust and groundless prejudice you have described did not pursue you?" demanded Annesley, deeply interested, yet almost alarmed by the vehemence of his companion.

"Even in parliament, sir," resumed Abednego, in a more subdued tone, "even in the parliament of liberal England—enlightened England—I was still 'Osalez, the Jew!' They went further, these upright legislators, than the bigots of Cadiz. With them I was not the son of the Jew—but the Jew. Though admitting me to be, by extraction, a Spaniard—by birth, an Englishman—by faith, a Protestant, I was still 'Osalez, the Jew!' My name and face avouched it; and are not a name and face authentic evidence in any other spot of earth than a court of justice? When I spoke well in the House, it was 'well enough for a Jew;' when ill—'what could be expected of a Jew?' The measures I advocated were stigmatised by the press, as brought forward under the protection of the Jews; and the whole repertory of waggish and vulgar jocularities was unloosed against me every time I opened my lips.

"I was almost maddened. Had I entered my public career at a maturer period of life, I should have known how to repress such sneers, or how to retort upon my scorers. But I was a boy. The generous impulses of youth were warm within me. Writhing under a sense of injustice, I lost my temper. I sometimes spoke vilely—and then, indeed, was the cry redoubled, that 'The second Daniel had broken down.' 'But, then, what could be expected of a man with such a name as Abednego!'

"A sarcastic member of the opposition, whose wit was armed as the stings of asps, attacked me one night in reply, upon an effective speech on the corn-laws, by which I had commanded the attention of the House, with the sneer that, 'he was aware that the honorable member's namesake and predecessor was memorable in scripture history through the persecutions of a king who fed on grass; but it did not follow that the Abednego of modern times was to become famous by his association with CORN.' The House was convulsed with laughter at this sorry jest; and the laugh of parliament burns as with the caustic impress of the branding-iron. The morning papers enlarged upon the pleasantry—which was echoed by all the underlings of the press; and before I had been three months in the House of Commons, instead of commanding the attention due to my abilities and good faith, I had become a laughing-stock as 'Corn-law Abednego!'

"Still, there was comfort in perspective. The woman I loved was too true, too good, too fond, to be influenced by the voice of vulgar derision. SHE knew that I was neither a Jew, nor the son of a Jew. SHE knew that my education had been liberal,—my habits of life luxurious; and the low-bred citations regarding Monmouth street and Duke's Place over her, at least, could have little influence. Even if her father should refuse me her hand, she, my tender, faithful, trusting love, could not recall the gift of her heart.

"The family returned to England, Basil;—the family which for months and months had accepted the hospitality of my father. Their door was shut in my face.

"In the interim, my engagement with her for whom I would have sacrificed my life, had been discovered, and all further intercourse between us was interdicted!

"The brother was still so infirm as to afford a fair plea for retiring instantly into the country; and in the aristocratic seclusion of his own park, the old lord fancied himself able to hold at bay the pre-

sumptuous importunities of the grandson of the Jew of Cadiz!"

"And you pursued them, of course!" Cried Basil Annesley, a new species of interest mingling with his curiosity. "You accepted dismissal from no other lips than those of her you loved?"

"I pursued them!"—resumed his companion, half closing his eyes, as if to reconcentrate himself into the illusions of retrospection. "I pursued them. I saw her again. We met as before, Basil—by stealth. The summer nights favored our frequent interviews. Again, she pledged her faith to me; again she swore, through good or evil report, to be faithful. But we were discovered,—spare me the recital! Through the instrumentality of her sisters, there was a cruel scene of detection. A struggle ensued—a fatal struggle,—the infirm brother was disabled. As I live and breathe, Basil, it was not I who inflicted the fatal injury! But he died!—The inquest absolved me. Surgical examination proved that the accidental bursting of a blood-vessel had proved fatal.

"To renew my intercourse with the family after this dreadful event, and the terrible publicity given to our cause of quarrel, was impossible. The very attempt had been an insult. My beloved wrote to me entreating forbearance. Overtures on my part, she said, would perhaps hurry her broken-hearted father into the grave. But still she swore again and again, with the fervid earnestness that woman only knows how to assume, that, whatever time or distance might divide us, for this world and the next she was my own,—in the sight of God, my wife!—In the sight of God!—Alas, even she, perhaps, felt that the mightiest of names might be appealed to in vain by so utter an outcast as Osalez the Jew!"

"Compose yourself, sir!"—murmured Basil in a kindly voice, on perceiving that big tears were rolling down the withered cheeks of his companion. "Disturb yourself no further to talk of this!"

"Now, or never!"—cried the old man, with a strong effort over his feelings. "I complied, Basil, with her injunctions. The Session was over. I returned to Cadiz with the intention of at least six months' absence from England and her! But what a spot had I chosen to nourish my regrets! The groves,—the gardens,—in which we had wandered hand in hand;—the same white walls, steeped in the same moonlight, were ever around me;—and she whose very soul had been conjoined there with mine in ecstatic delirium,—she was afar,—weeping,—lonely,—disconsolate,—waiting for me,—sorrowing for me!—In that thought, however, there was comfort!—My tears flowed the more, but the more soothingly, when I remembered that all my sorrows were shared by that dearest of all human beings!

"Within three months, Basil, from the day of my arrival at Cadiz, the newspaper was placed in my hand which announced her marriage with another!"

"What treachery!"—burst involuntarily from the lips of the young man, though a terrible suspicion had already presented itself to his mind, connecting the narrative now unfolded with the revelations of the old gardener.

"Treachery most monstrous and most ungrateful?"—rejoined, with kindling eyes, the excited Abednego.—"And lo! on that day I swore an oath before God,—an oath to be mightily avenged,—avenged on both,—on all,—the husband,—the wife,—the proud, obdurate family!—And I was so! My cry to the Almighty for vengeance was at least prospered!"

"Before you proceed further, sir, consider a moment!"—interposed Basil, perplexed and distressed.—"Let not the excitement of the moment betray you into avowals which you may hereafter bitterly repent!"

"I have considered, and would fain you should know all,"—replied the old man in a milder tone. "And first, to judge me fairly,—to judge me leniently,—reflect upon the misery of my position! Reflect that I had ventured my 'all of earthly happiness in that frail barque, and that the wreck was total!' My hopes were withered. Nothing was left me in this world,—nothing but MONEY! In the first struggles of my anguish, I resigned my seat in Parliament, and abjured the country to which I had been so despitely entreated and persecuted. I abandoned England. But I brought neither peace nor honor to my home. My father, whose highest ambitions were baffled by my despair, became himself surly and desponding; and domestic comfort was gradually banished from our household!

"It was probably the gloom thus engendered that caused my young sister to look abroad for happiness. Soon after my return, her mother died; and thus left alone with her fractious father and surly brother, the poor girl bestowed her affections on the only individual admitted within our doors, Verelst,—whom her father had engaged for her tuition in painting,—though, as a man of genius travelling for the perfectionment of his art, superior to the ordinary condition of an ordinary professor.

"When apprized of her attachment, my animosity to the young German, who could afford no home to the cherished flower of our fireside, and whom I unjustly accused of interested views in his attachment, sufficed to prove that I had suffered persecution and learnt no mercy!—I advised my father to drive the needy adventurer from our gates; and the consequence was the flight and dis-

astrous marriage of my sister, which precipitated my poor mortified father into the grave.

"I was now the master of millions! The efforts long made by my father for the realization of his property, with a view to quitting Spain, had, by this time, brought to bear the centralization of our capital. It was, however, indispensable for the completion of this object, retarded by the old man's death, that I should visit the East; in various parts of which my predecessors had maintained mercantile establishments. The expedition pleased me. I wished to behold mankind in an unconventional condition. I wanted to look upon the land which had given birth to my ill-fated race. Already my views of social morality were sufficiently disorganized;—in the East, I thoroughly threw off the prejudices of civilization. To behold other creeds established as firmly, and producing results as beneficial, and more consonant with the demands of climate and country than Christianity, convinced me that the all-seeing God,—to whom altars, like thrones, are but the footstools of his power,—who, for his own wise purposes, has apportioned the faith of the Mussulman to one tropic, of the Brahmin to another,—who revealed, by the lips of his prophets, centuries and centuries before the birth of Christ, the great sacrifice of Redemption, and the cruelty of the Hebrews by which alone it was accomplishable,—must behold with sentiments of mercy, wide from the vengeance imputed to Him by the implacable mind of man, the hereditary responsibility of the children of Israel for the predestined crime of their forefathers! Thenceforward the Jews, with whom I was classed, became, in my eyes, as any other people; save in being more unjustly aspersed, and consequently more deserving commiseration.

"Amid the succeeding changes of religion and legislation I was compelled to witness,—variations which render morality a matter of latitude and longitude, and the virtues of one hemisphere the vices of the other,—I began to look around me for a substantial and tangible standard of merit. 'WHAT,' I exclaimed, 'what constitutes right and wrong?—where is the Positive, where the True?'—The answer was 'GOLD!' Basil Annesley!

"Who will deny that, over all nations and languages,—under the tyranny of one or the tyranny of many,—the majesty of the crown or the majesty of the tiara,—MAMMON holds the preponderating influence? GOLD, GOLD, GOLD, constitutes the *To Kalon*,—the sole divinity,—the Jehovah of the universal earth!

"Once convinced of this, I bowed down my knee and worshipped! Long and eagerly in search of some First Cause in which to put my trust, I cried aloud with joy when I had found it! My wandering ark had stuck upon the top of an Ararat; and I sought no better land as a resting-place for the sole of my foot!

CHAPTER XVII.

"For five years or more I abided in the East—in splendor and enjoyment a very satrap!—Meanwhile, great revolutions were accomplishing in Europe. Thrones were flung down,—dynasties extinguished. The consequence of the French Revolution had made themselves felt even in the country so belabored into subordination by the rattan of sceptre and crozier;—and England still trembled to her centre!

"It was not in England, however, I was minded to abide. I hated her hypocritical institutions. I despised her pretended zeal for Christianizing the forms of the world; yet ever gainsaying, by her practices, the spirit of Christianity: persecuting, on pretence of resenting persecution, the wretched remnant of the children of Israel; yet faithless to the holy doctrines of the Cross whenever they traverse her vices or reprove her hardness of heart!

"France, if more a sinner, was at least candid and explicit in her sins; and indifferent, as a naturalized subject of Spain, to the war at that moment proceeding between the Directory and Great Britain, I hurried to Paris, to reap the fruitful harvest of pleasure of my golden sowing.

"At that epoch, society, disorganized by the still recent Revolution, was vibrating with those irregular oscillations which precede the restoration of order. It was the very moment for a man, intent, like myself, upon the lawless pursuit of pleasure, to purchase, at an easy cost, a variety of cumbrous spoils which the recent political convulsions had left masterless. A princely hotel in the capital,—a noble country residence, once royal, situated on the wooded shores of the Seine, enabled me to establish myself with a degree of magnificence more than rivalling that of the *Fermiers Generaux* flourishing under the auspices of monarchical corruption. All that was left of aristocracy in Paris crowded to my fetes, to luxurate in a renewal of sensual pleasures long withheld from their enjoyment. Half of the *Almanach des Gourmands*, Basil, was composed upon the strength of experiments made in my kitchen;—and the last effective notes of Garat were uttered in my *Salle de Concert*!

"No need to corrupt your unsullied imagination, boy, by the description of my effeminate pleasures! They were such as Sardapalus might have envied;—they were such as the ghost of the Marechal de Richelieu should have risen to share;—they were such, that (experience having instructed me in the finite and transient nature of physical enjoyment, and the *ennui* that follows it like a spectral

shadow) I have since discerned a charm in privation and abstinence, as a contrast to the wearisome repletion of former days.

"Still, while it lasted, that bewilderment of tumultuous pleasures was indeed intoxicating!—The first artists, wits, and men of letters of the day, crowded into my gilded saloons; even as, before and since, they beset the antechambers of royalty. Among others, Talleyrand, the cynical ex-bishop, and high-bred, future prince, was my frequent companion; and in our luxurious seclusion, what epigrams did we not venture upon the servilities of the human race,—what blasphemies against all creeds and faiths, save that of—the Golden Calf!

"Amid this chaos of political and moral disorganization arose the Consulate and Napoleon!—I took little heed of politics. An avowed Epicurean, I cared only for peace or war as an obstacle or facilitation to my pleasures; and though war becomes a bitter penalty in barren England,—compelled to seek from the Continent all her accessories of sensual enjoyment,—self-sufficing, fertile, joyous France, looks upon the closing of her ports without anxiety. I rejoiced among the rest, however, when Consular negotiation brought about a cessation of hostilities between the rival countries; for it filled me with glorious hopes to witness the arrival of those shoals of English travellers who never fail to rush to Paris, when occasion serve, for flinging aside their pall of national gloom.

"What triumph to deny them access to my house!—What delight to tantalize them with exclusion from the brilliant hospitalities of the wealthy Spaniards; for I was now redeemed from one species of obloquy. In Paris, religion had ceased to obtain mention from lips polite. Osalez the Jew would have been more nor less to them than Osalez the Gheber; and whether I worshipped the God of Christians, or the god Fo, was a matter of indifference to those who quaffed my Sillery and tasted my Salmis. Even the name of Osalez had, however, become so distasteful to me, from its connexion with my misfortunes, that, from the moment of settling in Paris, I assumed that of Clerval, derived from the estate I had purchased on my naturalization.

"Even as I had predicted scarcely were the fetes given for the celebration of the Peace of Amiens (of which those of the Hotel de Clerval were by far the most gorgeous) at an end, when I was beset with applications from English aristocrats aspiring to the honor of acquaintance, and access to my gallery and table. Having visited Paris to amuse themselves, they seemed to care little at whose cost they were amused.

"I had no fear of recognition. The burning sun of the East, and the habits of a luxurious satrap, had so thoroughly effaced from my features all trace of the boy-member, whom their levity had formerly caught down, as to place an irreconcilable incongruity between the presumptuous Jew of Cadiz and Clerval the Millionaire. I was accounted in Paris the finest of fine gentlemen. Having formed an intimacy in the East with the beautiful Mrs. Grant, now the graceful and popular wife of Talleyrand, Monsieur de Clerval was considered to occupy, in the fashionable circles of Neuilly, Raincy, and Rambouillet, the posts engrossed by the libertine Duc de Lauzun prior to the Revolution.

"On the other hand, my enormous wealth constituted a rock against which innumerable shallow vessels, launched upon the deceptive sea of Pleasure by fool-hardy London, were successively split to pieces. Wherever they attempted competition with the opulent Clerval, whether as regarded financial speculation, or the briefer madness of the gaming-table, ruin ensued. I retained my prodigious funds in a floating and tangible form: nor was it by means of mortgages or annuities I had to meet the pretensions of the enervate lordlings who presumed to confront me in my path, instead of treading at an humble distance in my footsteps. What chance, therefore, I entreat you, had the empty fops of White's whose capital was contained in the embroidered note-book in their waistcoat pockets, against one who, in the days when Rothschilds were not, was able to influence, by his financial operations, half the money-markets, in Europe?

"Among the first who fell a prey to my strength of courage and purse at the gambling-table, was the husband of the elder of those insolent sisters of the object of my affection, by whose malice my early hopes had been so cruelly blighted. Lord Willesden, (suffer me to conceal under that designation the title of my victim,) was one of those self-sufficient profligates who, on the pavement of St. James's street, acquire the authority of a potentate. Arriving in Paris with Charles Fox, flushed by his previous triumphs at White's, and insolent with the favor of Carlton House, the London puppy affected, in the first instance, the same air of defiance, when dining at Legacq's the Pavillon de Hanovre, to which his recognised position in his own country lent at least some color. For a time he affected to brave the man he could not aspire to surpass;—nor was it till he had lost five thousand livres to me on parole, that he was forced to recognise my superiority.

"Heartbroken by his system of profligacy, Lady Willesden was now a confirmed invalid, and rarely quitted her hotel. We had, consequently, never met; but her lord (launched in the full career of dissipation, affording hope to the Parisians that a new Phoenix was

arising from the ashes of their former dissoluteness) was my constant associate.

"Six weeks after his arrival in Paris, Lord Willesden was a ruined man,—ruined beyond hope,—beyond redemption! His estates, his houses, his plate, his jewels, were pledged to those to whom I furnished the funds, destined to flow back, a reflux Pactolus, into my golden coffers. Hazard and roulette had made the haughty aristocrat my slave!—My foot was upon his neck, and upon the neck of his children's children!—At that period, Basil, I was stern of heart as some devastating monster of antiquity!—Cruelty was my luxury,—revenge my pride!—But *that* cruelty had been engendered by evil entreatment; and it was perforce of scourging and torture that my nature waxed so hard!

"I now possessed a thousand advantages over the people by whom I had been persecuted into wickedness, and not one of them was neglected. Every night, when I retired to my luxurious couch, and ground my teeth in ecstacy over the recollection of the day's pleasures, it was, indeed, an enhancement to them to reflect, that not a mischief I was working but conveyed anguish to the bosom of the countrymen by whom I had been so unjustly reviled. Those who had 'spat upon my Jewish gaberdine' were making heavy atonement for the fault. I now trampled upon them in my turn. Talk of a bed of roses, Basil Annesley!—Commend *me* to the couch whose pillows are inflated by the swelling sighs of a prostrate enemy;—to the slumbers soothed by the murmurs of—"

He paused!—An involuntary shudder betraying the disgust of his companion had startled him into silence. But it was too late. The innate prejudice, long dormant in the soul of Basil, involuntarily retraced these works of malice to the Jewish origin of Osalez. For the first time, the young man beheld in his companion a legitimate descendant of the tribe who drove nails into the hands and feet, and pierced the side of the meek Jesus of Nazareth!

So forcibly was this feeling of estrangement depicted in the countenance of the young man, that, in resuming his narrative, Abednego hazarded no further reference to the animosities by which his vengeance had been actuated.

"Suffice it," he resumed, in a milder tone of voice, "that, while realizing in the more refined West the warm imaginings of a luxurious Oriental, I did not lose sight of those still profounder passions, and keener anticipations, engendered by the cold-blooded persecutions of English pride.

"Lord Willesden had become my puppet. The fastidious London coxcomb moved only at my beck and bidding. But though he was my daily guest,—sometimes at my brilliant hotel, sometimes at my princely country seat,—I scrupulously abstained from entering his doors. My pretext for declining his invitation was the infirm health of Lady Willesden, and a disinclination to intrude upon the sober domesticities of an invalid fireside; by which means I contrived to excite an interest in my favor in the mind of the afflicted wife. My indulgence as a creditor, and liberality as an associate, as yet prevented all rumors of her husband's new follies and prodigalities from reaching her ears; and hearing of Monsieur de Clerval only a hospitable host, a paragon of refinement courted in the best society, she felt grateful for the deference which kept him aloof from her impoverished seclusion.

"Though vain and dissolute, Willesden was fond of his wife,—that is, fond of her after the selfish fashion of the mere egotist. It would have been a relief to him, had he left her behind him in England, to have suddenly received tidings of her decease. But he could not bear to see her suffer. Conscious of the injuries he was inflicting upon her and her children, he shrunk from the spectacle of her altered countenance. The more ill and enfeebled she became, the deeper he plunged into excesses that banished all recollections of his embittered home.

"One morning, he entered my breakfast-room earlier than usual, and throwing himself into a *causeuse*, began to execrate, in his ordinary strain, his ill-luck of the night before.

"'It is all Maria's fault,' cried he. 'The foolish woman fancies it disturbs her to hear the *porte cochere* open in the dead of night; and protests she lies awake awaiting the signal of my return home. By these means, she has exacted a promise from me not to remain out after three; and the consequence is that, last night, just as the luck began to turn in my favor, I was forced to quit the table.'

"'You were quite right,' said I, adhering to my system of deference towards his wife's exactions. 'No occasion to become a brute because you are a *roue*. What are a few thousand livres more or less compared with an additional pang, inflicted on a suffering woman, already more than sufficiently injured?'

"Willesden never liked his wife less than when I affected to defend her cause. 'Confound the whole sex and their united injuries!' was his brutal rejoinder. 'It becomes *you*, forsooth, Clerval, to advocate the cause of these charming martyrs. Unshackled by the iron fetters of lawful wedlock, *you* behold in them a bevy of angels. My dear fellow, the mere saunterer in a garden beholds the roses in their bloom, worships their beauty and sweetness; but the proprietor, who is fated to see the leaves fall one by one, leaving only a thorny, useless haw behind, is apt to find his enthusiasm evaporate.—

N'importe! my matrimonial prospects are brightening! Next week, I shall be at liberty to observe the sun rise where and how I please. My wife's sister is coming over from England to nurse her. Maria has been despatching, I suspect, such doleful account of my neglects, that her family consider it necessary she should be better cared for!"

"Judge, Basil, how the blood, which for a moment had receded to my heart, leaving my guilty cheeks colorless, rushed anew to my face when Lord Willesden, in answer to my almost breathless inquiries acquainted me with the name of his expected visitant. Yes! It was herself,—it was the object of my first and only attachment! The husband, I thanked Heaven, was not to bear her company: his military duties rendering it impossible for him to leave England. She was to come alone, as the affectionate attendant of her dying sister.

"Never shall I forget the tumultuous nature of my feelings during the remainder of the day on which this intelligence was communicated. The ground appeared unsteady under my feet; the atmosphere too light to satisfy my respiration. I scarcely knew how to meet the singular occasion that presented itself for the gratification of the hungry vengeance I had been cherishing like some beast of prey in the darksome depth of my soul.

"A few more days, and she arrived. With assumed carelessness did I proceed to question Lord Willesden concerning his sister in law; and with apparent indifference I heard that she had been wedded against her will, and was a repining wife and unexulting mother.

"'Thank Heaven,' was Willesden's concluding phrase, 'she will be content to devote herself to the sick-room. Though still in the prime of life, poor soul, the world has ceased to attract her. So long as she can be induced to remain here, therefore, I am at liberty to divert myself to my heart's content.'

"From that moment, my influence over Willesden was exercised with wholly different views. Affecting deep compassion for the position in which he had placed his children, I was constantly preaching reformation. Aware of the feebleness of his nature, I was certain that at every time his fair sister-in-law pleaded the cause of his injured family, or implored him to renounce his fatal propensity for play, he would exclaim, 'You are almost as great a bore as Clerval!'—Just such are the arguments which my friend is perpetually using! Clerval protests that a husband and father has no pretext for indulging in vulgar libertinism."

"I was careful, nevertheless, while figuring in the novel character of a Mentor, not to neglect the care of my reputation as a man of gallantry. The sick-room of Lady Willesden was frequented by the Duchess of Gordon, and half-a-dozen other Englishwomen of rank, who glittered in the gay world of Paris during the brief cessation of hostilities between the two countries; and I spared no pains to render my name a constant topic of discussion in their fastidious circle. Never had fetes excited so supreme a sensation as those which I devised to dazzle the eyes of my unsuspecting countrywomen,—never was exclusiveness so insolent as that which I affected concerning their admittance within my gates. Sometimes, those gates unclosed for the diversion of hundreds of guests, who were feted with the prodigality and fancifulness of some Arabian tale. Sometimes, the number of the favored was limited to a single fortunate groupe,—and not a syllable allowed to transpire of the nature of the entertainment, of which the amount of the cost was alone cited by the envious; till, like Louis XVI., I was honored by the frivolous beauties of the day with the name of 'The Enchanter.'

"My object was speedily accomplished. I learnt from Willesden that my peculiarities excited considerable curiosity in his family circle.

"'Lady Willesden seems revived as by a miracle, by her sister's arrival!' said he one day as we were dashing back to Paris from the Chateau de Clerval, at the utmost speed of a set of fine English horses, to be in time for the opera; 'and the first symptom of her reviving health is her inquisitiveness about yourself. These women want to make your acquaintance Clerval. When will you come and dine with me?'

"With sudden reserve, I pleaded old standing engagements for a fortnight to come; and Willesden being perfectly aware that many of these were of my own creation, the sensitiveness of an embarrassed man attributed my reluctance to join his little circle to the distress of his fireside, and the defects of an unaccomplished cook.

"'I am aware,' he retorted, 'that I have nothing to attract an Amphytrion like yourself. Nor should I have presumed to invite Monsieur de Clerval, the gastronome, to fast at my humble board, but for the importunity of my sister-in-law, who is eager to make your acquaintance. Your munificence as a patron of the arts (of which she has taken it into her flighty head to become a votary, to console herself, I suppose, for the disappointments of defeated affections) have strangely excited her interest in your favor.'

"I bowed and smiled, but made no move towards conciliating the wish thus intimated. On the contrary, the plainer his hints the more resolutely I kept aloof. At length, alarmed lest he might estrange me from himself by further pertinacity, Lord Willesden ceased to importune me to visit his house; and my firmness served only to augment the restless curiosity of those against whose peace my manoeuvres were concerted. But I had seen her again. From my box at

the opera, in the public promenades, I had held the object still and ever dearest to my heart; and the sight of her did but still further stimulate my projects of vengeance. She had now attained the full maturity of womanly charms. The lovely girl of eighteen had become the beautiful and commanding woman of thirty. How beautiful, the admiration she attracted, whenever seen by glimpses in the society of Paris, sufficiently attested; how beautiful, the tumults of my own distracted heart, as I hurried on such occasions from her presence, afforded a far more painful proof. Unrestrained in all other pursuits and inclinations, the caution and self-control I was forced to observe in this, served only to augment the force of my passion. I was becoming madly and desperately in love,—far more desperately than when, with the purer fervor of boyhood, I wooed her to become my bride.

"I appreciated too highly, Basil, the gentle nature of that beloved being, to suppose it possible, the mere dazzlements of vanity would suffice for her captivation. I knew that she must respect the man, as well as admire the patron, before the brilliant Clerval created any serious impression on her feelings. To effect this, I contrived, that in all her little acts of charity, my name should reach her as beforehand with her in the duties of benevolence. She could not extend her hand to the orphan or the widow, but she encountered mine already outstretched in mercy. Many of these instances were mere clap-traps, got up to attract her notice. By the aid of Money, Basil, *anything* may be manufactured to order,—even 'Cases of extreme distress';—and little did that humane woman suspect that the wants she fancied herself to be relieving were as much an effort of art as the scenery of the Grand Opera."

"I scarcely conceive, sir" suddenly interrupted Basil Annesley, "the advantage likely to arise to either of us from these confidences. If an effusion of penitence, it is not for me to grant you absolution; if a matter of vaunt, as I would fain retain some respect for my benefactor, I entreat you to refrain from avowals which are gradually exciting my disgust."

"Hear me to an end," cried Abednego. "I address you neither in a tone of boastfulness nor of whining remorse; but as a man, having wrestled hard to hand with the sorest temptations and trials of life, willing to impart to one he dearly loves the fatally-earned fruits of his experience!—All I can do to favour your squeamish tender-heartedness, is to pass over briefly the snares with which I encompassed the path of my destined victim,—sometimes hoping, but oftener despairing of success. But if unable the second time to conquer her affections, I was resolved at least to humble her pride.

"Spring was in its prime, when I announced one of those gorgeous entertainments which, once in every month, used to set the fashionable world of Paris into commotion. It was to be a daylight fete at my chateau on the Seine; and a flotilla of Venetian barges, long in preparation was launched for the purpose of conveying my guests to the landing stairs. It was speedily rumored among the invited, that not a single English person was to be included among the guests of Monsieur de Clerval; and though Willesden, my constant companion, flattered himself, that, as a matter of course, an exception would be made in his favor, I took an early opportunity to inform him that, having an especial object for my *Fete des Lilacs*, I was forced to exclude him among the rest of the English pretendants.

"Though evidently nettled by my communication, Willesden was too deeply my debtor to hazard a syllable of remonstrance. Attributing the word 'object' to some reigning lady of my thoughts, he ventured to banter me concerning the mysterious *liaison* demanding such vast concessions; and I replied in terms of romantic gallantry, which, I justly surmised, would be repeated by his fireside, and serve only to excite a new interest in my favor.

"Without intending it, Willesden was constantly betraying to me the fruition of my schemes. I found that I was a perpetual subject of discussion at his house. While informing me how often he was forced to become my champion with his wife and sister, his silly vanity exposed far more than he intended. He did not disguise from me how grievously his lovely guest was mortified to find herself excluded from the only house in Paris she had the slightest curiosity to enter.

"I looked grave; and when Lord Willesden again approached the subject, abstained wholly from his society—and even issued orders for his non-admission to my house;—nay, if we met, by chance, in the Bois de Boulogne, I assumed so cold and lowering a countenance, that the poor man was terrified by the wrath he had provoked.

"The amount of IO U's and bonds, bearing his signature, in my strong box, rendered it unsafe for him to give offence to one so potential. Had I not reason for self-gratulation?—Abednego the Jew had reduced the insolent English peer to the most abject subservience?

"By degrees, he was compelled to assume a still viler attitude. The embarrassment of his affairs rendered a still further levy of money indispensable; and not a banker could be found to assist him. Thus circumstanced, in a foreign country, the straits to which he was reduced became alarming; but I had so often obliged him, and had of late assumed so forbidding a countenance, that to me he dared not apply. Little suspecting that the whole affair was of my contrivance, he met me in the world as though nothing had occurred;

nor was it till the humiliation of finding his wife and guest on the eve of becoming homeless, drove him to the application, he once more addressed me in the subdued tone of a suppliant.

"Before the request had half escaped his lips, it was granted; nay the amount of the loan he desired was trebled, and forced upon him; till, in the exuberance of his gratitude, Lord Willesden would, I verily believe, have subscribed to *any* terms his creditor saw fit to propose.

"Do not perplex yourself about such a mere trifle!" said I,—"I am only too happy to assist you. If you wish, my dear Willesden, to oblige me in your turn, all I have to ask is, that you will admit me, as a friend, into your family circle, in spite of any remonstrances that may be addressed to you by lady Willesden and her sister."

"Remonstrances?" repeated the astonished Willesden. "Why, I have been hinting to you for the last six weeks the earnest desire of the latter to make your acquaintance."

"The lady's good intentions may subside after she has seen me. Besides, I shall not be satisfied with the concessions of mere acquaintanceship. The object of my ambition is, to stand pre-eminent in her favor."

"In that case, my dear Clerval, I cannot flatter you with much prospect of success," replied Willesden, somewhat embarrassed. "Though unhappy in her marriage, she is incapable of losing sight of her duties as a wife and a mother."

"Of course!—All your English ladies are so rigid in their principles—so correct in their conduct—that one cannot but wonder how such libels as divorce bills are suffered to go unpunished."

"I am not vaunting the virtue of my sister-in-law," replied Lord Willesden; the blood mantling in his sallow cheek, convincing me that nothing but his obligations towards me prevented him from knocking me down. "She has no heart to bestow. In early life, she formed a low connexion, the effects of which, my poor wife assures me, she has never been able to throw off."

"It was now my turn to flush with anger; and the insolence of the noble insolvent confirmed me in my evil projects."

"No one is able to calculate upon the caprices and fantasticalities of woman's nature," said I. "All I ask of you is a solemn promise that, whatever ungraciousness may be testified towards me by Lady Willesden and her sister, you will not deny my access to your house."

"Deny you access?" cried his lordship. "You,—my best friend, my benefactor!—You, who throughout the winter I have been courting as a guest?—Absurd!"

"Absurd perhaps. But having hitherto resisted your pressing invitations, I will not even now accept them, unless under a written guarantee that my welcome is secured."

"After the numberless obligations he had signed in my favor, this appeared a trifling concession; and laughing heartily at my squeamishness, Lord Willesden entered readily into what appeared to be a joke, by drawing up a paper ensuring me access to his house at all hours, and under all possible circumstances."

"I conclude that, with certain modifications, he announced my sudden caprice to his wife; for I had reason to know that my visit was now hourly expected and prepared for. I chose, however, to be expected in vain!—nearly a month passed and Willesden must have attributed the wayward conditions I had dictated to some momentary whim; for, so far from availing myself of the permission I had dictated to some momentary whim; for, so far from availing myself of the permission I had extorted, I abstained from associating even with himself. Curiosity and interest were, accordingly, excited to the strongest in his family circle, concerning the man whose movements were erratic as those of a meteor; and on my announcing a second summer entertainment at my chateau, *La fête de Roses*, with similar restrictions as to the English, with the single exception of Lord Willesden's family, I rightly conjectured that my invitation would be accepted with gratitude."

"Money constitutes the magic of our epoch. But Paris, above all other places, affords an auspicious field for the exercise of the fairy wand endowed by prodigality. Resolved that the last fête of the mysterious Clerval should excel all his previous efforts, I was ably seconded by the genius of that new *Renaissance des arts*, fostered under the auspices of the Consulate. But the enormous outlay (rumors of the amount of which afforded ample occupation to the wonderers of the great world) was produced less by the splendor of the entertainment, than by my conceit of producing on the banks of the Seine, an exact republication of those well-remembered gardens of Cadiz, the scene of the happiest moments of my life. The illusion was complete. Tree for tree, arbor for arbor, the spot which had witnessed my midnight interviews with her, was reproduced for the occasion."

"It was *there*, Basil, I received her!—It was *there* I advanced to welcome that repining wife, when, in all the exuberance of matronly beauty, and leaning on the arm of her brother-in-law, she beheld before her the injured lover of her youth."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"In the perversity of my heart, Basil Annesley, I anticipated with confidence the success of my projects. The humiliations of former days were effaced by a series of triumphs. Everything, of late had

prospered with me; and long accustomed to the adoration of the vain and interested, I doubted not that the woman described to me as a 'repining wife,' would be content to atone for all I had undergone for her sake."

"But while triumphing in the strength of our own vices, we are apt to calculate too largely on the weakness of others. Whether as the arbitrary voluptuary of the East, or the corrupt Epicurean of Paris, my experience had not prepared me for the integrity of heart,—the self-respect,—the purity,—the feminine pride arrayed against my pretensions. She not only resented the manœuvres by which she had been betrayed into my presence, but rejected as an insult, my protestations of unaltered attachment."

"Had I approached her in a less presumptuous guise, had I appeared before her poor,—humble,—friendless, the promptings of her heart might have stood my friend. But she despised the proud and ostentatious man who stood before her as a conqueror. Her clear understanding, her upright purposes were not to be baffled by my shallow intrigues; and the net in whose meshes my subtlety had entangled her shallow brother-in-law was unable to enfold her in its meshes. I have not courage to recite the opprobrious terms in which she manifested her insight into my views and character."

"My father and family judged wisely!" said she; "and I now admit that I was blinded to your real character by my partial affections! The penalty invoked by the blaspheming Jews upon themselves and their children's children has converted even you, Osalez, into a worshipper of Mammon. You have attempted to dazzle, by your gorgeous prodigality, the heart that might have been moved to seek you out in penury or affliction. My father was right. There exists no real sympathy between us."

"Judge of my indignation,—judge of my despair, on hearing from her own lips this bitter condemnation! Alternately disposed to throw myself at her feet and admit the justice of her sentence, and to turn upon herself the vengeance that had already manifested itself towards her family, I felt, when she withdrew in all the dignity of wounded pride from my presence, that the whole aim of my existence was frustrated! For two following days I shut myself up in surly desperation. On the third, I emerged from my solitude, with the amended purpose of imploring forgiveness, and offering an atonement. She was gone! She had quitted Paris! Mistrusting the protection of her brother-in-law, she was on her road to England,—to the safe-keeping an honorable husband!"

"My unfortunate sister is the companion of my inauspicious journey," said the letter she addressed to me from Dover. "Should the effort prove too much for her declining health, it is *you* who will have sentenced her to death. Apprized by Lord Willesden of his insolvency and the ruin of her innocent children, she had not courage to abide, in a strange land, the penalty likely to be enforced by a nature ruthless as your own. Her husband remains behind to answer you with his person. Do your worst. If you dare, render Lord Willesden your prisoner—as he is already your dupe!"

"But you did not dare!" interrupted Basil Annesley, whose mind seemed suddenly relieved from some terrible apprehension. "You had not courage to inflict a further injury on this noble-minded woman!"

"You say truly. I had not. But others were more relentless. Some months after her return to England, slanderous tongues announced to her husband that my flagitious scheming had prospered. As I live and breathe, Basil, I had no share in the tale of scandal. It was the diabolical invention of some enemy. Yet, groundless as it was, it drove the unhappy man to his grave. He perished, Basil Annesley, at the head of his regiment, on the field of honor; but it was with the cruel conviction that his wife was an adulteress, and his unborn child the offspring of shame. Unhappy woman! To be cursed with a husband and a lover alike incapable of appreciating the virtue of her soul!"

"The poor atonement in my power to offer, was not withheld. But far more contumeliously than ever her proud father had rejected me, did she decline the offer of my hand. Regarding me as the assassin of her brother, the murderer of her husband, she spurned me from her presence. She spoke of her duty towards her children. *Her children!* The girl had been, by its father's will, already withdrawn from her protection, as unworthy to preside over her education. The boy—the innocent boy now nestling in her bosom—had been rejected by him as the offering of a crime. Basil—Basil! Why did not your little hands upraise themselves to intercede in my behalf?"

"My presentiments, then, have not deceived me?" cried the young man, starting from his seat. "It is, indeed, my dear and unfortunate mother who has been through life your victim!"

"My victim? There was not an earthly sacrifice I would not have made but to obtain permission to become the humblest of her household servants! My victim?—No, no!—I was hers!—Maddened by her indifference, her abhorrence, I now rushed into the most frantic excesses. I flew to the gaming-table. The cold, calculating Clerval played, for once, like a child."

"My lucky star deserted me. My long-boasted opulence was gradually melting away. Even the securities I held in pledge from

Willesden, were at length staked and lost,—lost to those who did not hesitate to expose him to reprisals, attributed by his unfortunate wife and family to myself.

"On the brink of ruin, I looked around me for some desperate chance whereby to retrieve my fortunes, or achieve an honorable death. War was waging in Germany, and I joined the army of the Sambre and Meuse as a volunteer. By degrees my heart warmed to the standard under which I had enlisted. All other pains and pleasures exhausted, the excitement arising from a military career under an able and dauntless commander was a bewildering novelty; and as a means of inflicting humiliation on a country allied with my natural enemies, I embarked all the energies of my nature in the cause of the Eagle of France.

"Like all other men in earnest in their profession, during the supremacy of Napoleon, advancement followed. I was speedily rewarded by a commission. I was promised further advancement. But my military career was destined to a cruel and unexpected interruption.

"In traversing Heidelberg, in the course of my campaign, remembering it to be the birth-place and abiding place of Verelst, I took occasion to make such inquiries respecting the condition of my sister as proved that her letters addressed to my father, which had fallen into my hands, intimating her miserable condition, conveyed no exaggerated picture of poor Rachael's fallen fortunes. Pampered by prosperity, the stubbornness of cruelty was still rampant within me; for the evil practised against myself had taken root in my soul, and was bringing forth bitter fruits. Having sworn never to behold her more, I made it a virtue to adhere to my oath, and though moved to alleviate her misfortunes, bestowed my humble gift upon her in the shape of alms from a stranger, rather than as an offering of brotherly love.

"The jealous feelings of Verelst took alarm. He pursued the Capitaine de Clerval who had presumed to send a gift of money to his lovely wife. But the artist's application for an audience having been answered by an insult, the indignant man waylaid my coming forth, and rewarded my insolence with a blow. I drew upon him, rushed upon him,—would fain have fought him, fain have killed him! But no more than a slight wound had signalized my frenzy; I was seized and placed in arrest. Imperial discipline was rigorous on such points; and I, so lately the man of millions, might possibly have been shot like a dog, after a hasty court-martial, had not Verelst come forward with attestations of—. Guess on what plea the fool pretended to preserve my life! Guess!"

Basil Annesley shrugged his shoulder in intimation of ignorance.

"Insanity! And his wife being my nearest of kin, his attestations were received with deference! While I stood by, in custody and listened, the fellow presuming to swear before my face that, for some years past, my conduct had been indicative of aberration of intellect! It is true his absurd depositions saved my life. But at what a cost! To be sent back to Paris under escort, as a lunatic! To be deposited in Charenton, till the physicians decided on my case! In the irritation of all I had to undergo, I accused Verelst and my sister of malicious and interested views,—of getting me shut up for life with a view to obtain the administration of my remaining property."

"Verelst is as incapable of such an act of baseness as the first noble in the land," cried Basil, with warm indignation.

"I agree with you, now that I judge the case dispassionately. But wait, young gentleman, till you have been seized and manacled, till you have had your head shaved, and been starved and douched at the caprice of an experimentalizing apothecary,—to judge equitably of the motives of your incarcerator," said Osalez, with a shudder.

"Had my poor brother-in-law entered my cell at Charenton, I am convinced I should have throttled him on the spot!"

"There, however, Basil, there, as elsewhere, gold proved my sword and my buckler! One of the visiting surgeons was a shrewd worldly man, who soon saw through the nature of my malady and position. Trust me, that when he proposed confederacy, I drove no hard bargain with him in assigning the sum for which he was to get me placed in a Maison de Sante, as partly convalescent; and, in process of time, pronounce me cured and obtain my enlargement!"

"It was during that gloomy interval of imprisonment, Basil, that my nature become thoroughly desophiscated. I learnt, by hard authority, with how many of the so-styled necessities of life human nature is able to dispense. I soon found myself the happier for lacking menial attendance. Under such circumstances, my greatest luxury was to be alone. Within the four bare walls of my cell, the expansion of my glowing mind supplied all the splendors of the East. I carried my Paradise within me. My dreams were now as glowing of the gardens of Sulistan, or the white walls of Cadiz, as my waking impressions had been of yore; and lo! I said unto my soul, what need of costly tapestries, what need of vessels of gold or vessels of silver, what need of the toys of art, the marble of the sculptor, the canvass of the painter, since, abiding here in solitary self-contemplation, I am as much in the enjoyment of these things as when long use and habit rendered them inostensible and unnoticed under the roof of my stately Spanish palace or Parisian villa? Com-

pulsory starvation, compulsory vigils, compulsory self-attendance, soon rendered my penance habitual, and blunted the edge of the most cutting hardship. From that period I became master of myself, and, consequently, doubly master of other people.

"Not to weary you with details, suffice it that I was eventually restored to freedom. But, instead of profiting by my liberty to resume the enervate habits of life which those four years of thralldom had rendered irksome, I thenceforward devoted myself, solely and exclusively, to the worship of Mammon. Solitary reflection had convinced me that MONEY was the omnipotent instrument by which I might still work out my projects of vengeance. I resolved to punish my insolent brother-in-law by the tortures of poverty, while millions were amassing in my coffers; and eventually bequeath them to some public charity or national foundation, while my kindred were begging their bread, and the woman who had twice cast me from her was exposed to all the bitterness of want! There was ecstasy to me then, Basil, in these projects of vengeance! Yes—ecstasy!—If God have reserved to Himself the dealing of Vengeance, is it not because a pleasure worthy the Immortal?"

"You deceive yourself, Mr. Osalez!" remonstrated Basil; "or you would deceive me. Deal frankly with both, and you will own that you experienced dearer delight last night, in your reconciliation with those nearest to you in blood, than ever presented itself to your enjoyment in the course of your projects of retribution."

The silence of Abednego seemed to concede tacit assent to this proposition. But he contented himself with replying evasively, "If I resorted to the joys of revenge to keep alive the lazy current of my blood, what else had they left me?—England had closed the lists of fair and honorable ambition to my approach,—and through them, access to the joys of domestic life. Society had driven me like a dog from its gates. What wonder, then, that the hapless brute, thus spurned, should become rabid, and snarl, and turn upon his persecutors? No matter! I am not here to advocate my own virtues with a view to canonization! Enough that I soon found abundant and increasing joy in the procreation of wealth. To me it superseded all human instincts. GOLD was my wife, my child, my kith, my kin!—No labor was too great, no humiliation too abject for its acquirement. The filthiest mud seemed not to defile my fingers, in which I discerned a single glittering particle! Perhaps you will excuse these instincts as characteristic of my Jewish origin?—No, Basil! They were not in me when I wandered with her among the orange-groves of Cadiz;—they were not in me when howled by fools and bigots out of the House of Commons! They were cravings—morbid cravings,—engendered by that gnawing famine of the soul to which I was scornfully condemned by my fellow-men!"

"The pursuit of wealth became a pastime rather than a toil. I delighted in the cunning disguises by which I attempted to penetrate the motives, and overmaster the destinies of my clients. Most men are fond of stage-playing, if they would but own it;—some in their amateur theatres,—some in the pulpit,—some in the rostrum,—some on the wool-sack,—some on the Bench of Bishops;—I, in Paulet street, St. Agnes le Clare!—I was, at times, as proud of the dramatic genius, which enabled me to go, like the wind, hither and thither where I listed, as a Judge after delivering a pathetic charge, or the Rector or Chancellor of a University when playing the bigwig for the bewonderment of dunces!—I had my rat-holes in which to chaffer with my Jewish confraternity. I had my compting-houses, and tables of money-changers, for those having a fairer footing in the Temple of Mammon;—and, lastly, I had a decent home wherein to treat with the capitalists of the day, so as to induce their belief in my non-exemption from the ordinary tastes and appetites of mortal nature. I saw that, by standing too far aloof from the sinful lusts of the flesh, the pomps and vanities of life, I must pass for either saint or—devil!"

"These motley vicissitudes served to redeem human existence from its monotony. I was alternately king and beggar,—Richard in the tragedy, Abel Drugger in the farce. Gods! how have I laughed in my sleeve, at the dupehood of the world! What puppets were the great in my hands—what tools the powerful! Exquisite, indeed, was the triumph of watching the manœuvres of those who treated me as an engine, and who, the while, were mere engines for machinations of my own!"

"Such were still my sentiments and occupations, Basil Annesley, up to the moment of our first encounter! But the moment a hand so young and stainless as yours poured oil into my wounds, a new life was enkindled within me. I seemed to espy noble and undreamed-of purposes of MONEY. I began to suspect that it might be converted into a means of human happiness as well as of transitory pleasure. Your interest in behalf of Verelst brought the exile of my sister to my knowledge. Mercy was dawning within me.—Peace brooded in my heart over her dove-like couplets.

"I visited the family in disguise. I learnt to love their virtues, to admire their graces. I have less compunction, Basil, for having abandoned those lovely girls to the rough schooling of adversity; for it has left them good, true, generous, tender,—all that the gilding of luxury disguises in the courtly bred, if it do not destroy. For

worlds, I would not have their honest natures resemble the frippery do-nothingness of your friends, the Maitlands! Nor would I have them heartless and proud—like—like *HER*,—for all the happiness I trust my old age may yet derive from their gentle companionship!

"And now, Basil Annesley, (lest I see you again place your hand on your waistcoat pocket in search of the trumpery toy by which your useless moments are admeasured,) I release you! I ask no opinion, no sentence, on what I have related! I see, by your altered countenance towards me, that a revolution hath been effected in your mind. Be not over-hasty. Ponder over these things in your heart, and maturely weigh them ere we meet again."

Relieved by this intimation, the young soldier rose calmly and coldly from his seat, and glanced towards the panel by which he had accomplished his entrance.

"No need to sneak out *there*!" cried the old man, assuming a more cheerful tone. "I shall be proud to introduce you into another of my households." Then, throwing open the door of a dining-room, hung with masterpieces of the old masters, he conducted him through a handsome library, into a snug dressing-room, where his well-brushed coat and hat, his handkerchief and gloves, formally set out, were awaiting him, beside a commodious toilet-table, preparatory to quitting the house. Involuntarily young Annesley shrugged his shoulders.

"You are thinking of Delahaye street, eh?" observed Osalez, with a smile. "To me both places are of the same account. My heart and soul are not empty enough to find room for petty wants or repinings.—

When the mind's free, the body's delicate.

Should you ever acquire objects in life of the engrossing nature of those that absorb the attention of a great capitalist, you will cease to take thought of the softness of your couch, or the flavor of your dishes. Yet why not do myself fuller justice in your eyes, by avowing that half the privations to which you have seen me expose myself, were acts of voluntary penance? Alas! Basil, if not a Jew, I merit, I own, the charge made by St. Paul, of being 'in all things too superstitious.' I incline much to sacrifices of atonement. That you sought me, Basil, and befriended me amid the wretchedness which appeared so real, seems intended by the Almighty as repayment for all my self-inflicted tortures."

While buttoning on his coat, Osalez intimated to his visiter a desire to transport him in his carriage to the West end of the town.

"Still harping on your horse?" cried he, when his young visiter again excused himself. "Fear nothing! By my orders, Zebedee conveyed the beast back to your stables half an hour ago."

"Why, you do not even know my stables!" cried Basil, almost with indignation. "Pardon me!—I know all and everything that concerns you. And now, will you come back and dine with me quietly in Bernard street?"

Already Basil had excused himself, while Osalez was about to step into a chariot awaiting him at the door of the handsome mansion from the spacious hall of which they were emerging together, when an intimation, that the Verelsts were already installed the inmates of their wealthy kinsman, induced him to pause. His scarcely audible mutterings about a change of dress were instantly scouted by Abednego!

"How long have you been such a coxcomb?" cried he. "The last time you dined with me, you had not changed your dress! Why so much respect for the Verelsts?—Have you not been the child of their house—the friend of their firesides? At all events, come with me, and I will drop you when we reach Temple-Bar."

"You have persuaded Verelst, then, to give up his engagements to the Marquis?" inquired Basil, as they drove at a rapid pace through the city.

"On the contrary, I never even attempted it! I appreciated too highly an artist's independence of mind! Let him distinguish himself—immortalize himself, if he can! So much the better and happier for them all. The girls and their mother will reside with me during his absence in the North."

On arriving in Bernard street (for, once installed in the carriage, Basil found it impossible to resist the old man's solicitations) young Annesley was as cheerfully welcomed by Mrs. Verelst and her daughters as ever he had been to their humble fireside, either at Heidelberg or in London.

"You have already officiated as my valet, let me now act as yours," cried Osalez, addressing Basil, and motioning to his pompous butler to lead the way to his dressing-room. "Dine with us, Basil, you must and shall. I have some Neckar wine that Verelst swears is superior to Hockheimn—(Lord Maitland, no doubt, has made you a judge of Hock!)—that will open your heart and his, and carry you both back to your cordial German days of old!"

It was when their hearts were open and back in the past, that Basil began to be entirely of the opinion of Verelst, that the Neckar wine of Osalez was equal to Hock. But for the single apprehension of Esther's approaching departure to the North with the family—an apprehension he dared not confront, yet could not dismiss from his mind,—he would have felt that he was enjoying the happiest day of

his life! Welcomed on all sides as a friend,—benefactor,—idol,—Osalez seemed to fix his eyes upon him as though he were worth a million a carat; while the Verelsts could scarcely refrain from folding him to their hearts, as the origin of all their prosperity and peace.

It stung him to the soul when the reflection glanced into his mind how much more these people loved and prized him than his mother! How seldom in the course of his life had Lady Annesley testified towards him a thousandth part of the sympathy he was now exciting! For what other human being, however, did she display more? Was she tender even of herself?—Did she not rather, like Osalez, render her existence a species of voluntary penance?

For the first time Basil Annesley reflected on all this with a degree of pity amounting almost to awe. He dreaded to reflect on what she might have undergone to imbue a soul so lofty with such repellent austerity of sternness. He knew that, after his father's death in the Peninsula, his sister had been peremptorily withdrawn by the Annesley family from her protection: and connecting this circumstance with the narrative of Osalez, the ravings of old Nicholas, and the discovery of a volume in her possession bearing the hateful initials of A. O.,—trembled to consider what might have been the direful vicissitudes of her troubled life. It was almost impossible to him to remain seated at the board of Abednego!

By degrees every vestige of color forsook his cheek; and his emotion was so manifest, that not one of the party attempted to detain him when he rose from table and pleaded indisposition as a pretext for quitting the house.

"Fain would I have enjoyed one happy evening in their society," mused Basil, as he hurried homewards. "But the indulgence had only been too dangerously dear!—No! We will meet no more till I have had a full explanation with my dear mother. If unsatisfactory, I will never see them again!"

Next night he was at Barlingham. It was through the twilight of a glorious evening in May, that he *now* traversed the fields; a glorious evening fragrant with the breath of thyme and hawthorns,—the springy thymy herbage buoyant beneath his feet,—and the woodlands quivering with that tenderer foliage of early spring, whose beauty is as of an hour's duration.

On reaching the small platform in which the surly old mansion stood isolated, his heart sunk within him. The dread of his mother's mournful voice and aspect overpowered his spirits. The embarrassment,—the chill invariably benumbing his feelings in the only spot on earth where he was entitled to feel at ease, exercised their usual distressing spell over his heart.

On entering the sitting-room he found Lady Annesley seated in her high-backed ebony chair, at her writing-table beside the open casement; enjoying, in solitary meditation, the balmy sweetness of that delicious night. The dews were rising,—the birds at rest. All was stillness, and holiness, and peace. But though she must have seen him traverse the little bridge across the moat in order to reach the old portal, she had not stirred a step to greet her only son! Nevertheless Basil flattered himself that he discerned in her countenance tokens of more than ordinary sociability and good will.

"You are welcome, my dear son!" was as much from the lips of that austere recluse, as the most impassioned caress from a more demonstrative parent.

It was always difficult to enter into conversation with one who took so little interest in worldly events, the frivolities with which ordinary women are amusable. Anecdotes of the day,—accounts of a new opera or forthcoming ballet,—a brilliant debate or the last new novel,—provoked from *her* a listless monosyllable, nay sometimes the most reproving severity of countenance. On the present occasion; to his utter surprise, she was the first to question him concerning the dissipations of London.

"With whom have you been living lately?" said she, in a more than usually cheerful voice. "The breaking up of the establishment at Rochester House must have been a loss to you,—frequenting it as you did! The Maitlands too, I find, are about to quit London. You used to speak of their society as a resource. How will you be able to part with the pretty-fair-haired Lucy, who is said to regard you with such partiality?"

"The Maitlands are the sort of girls to regard with partiality any disengaged young man disposed to trifle away his time at their house," replied Basil, becoming grave in his turn, as he reflected with what horror lady Annesley was likely to listen to an avowal of the *motive* of his ingratitude for Lucy's predilection!

"Knowing which, you should have been on your guard against any entanglement of the poor girl's affections," retorted his mother. "In such matters, a woman's peace of mind is the last thing considered;—though, Heaven knows, no holier trust is confided to man by the hands of his Maker, than the happiness and wellbeing of the woman with whom through life he is connected!"

"I heartily agree with you!"—cried her son; "and should hate myself were I capable of dealing lightly or cruelly with any woman to whom I believed myself an object of genuine attachment. Lucy Maitland, on the contrary, has trifled with *me*,—since, while indulging in what London calls flirtation, she was prepared to accept the first elder son, with good prospects, who came in her way."

"In short, you are devoid of grace and sympathy! And yet," resumed Lady Annesley, "I was desired to sound your affections by those who are anxious, humble as your fortunes are, to encumber them with a wife, and who seem to have apprehended, in Miss Maitland, an obstacle to their projects!"

"Projects of a marriage with *me*?" cried Basil, in great surprise and some indignation. "I am exceedingly obliged to their officiousness! But I have neither the means nor the inclination to marry! How absurd,—how impertinent!"

"Your affections *are* engaged then, though not to Miss Maitland, or you would not be thus resentful!" observed Lady Annesley. "This is precisely the point which Vardyn, my solicitor, has written to me to ascertain. He charged me, I must admit, not to betray his mission to yourself. But I am getting weary of mysteries! As we approach the grave, Basil, the claims of those we love to our entire confidence, acquire stronger force. A few short years, and all that can be known of all of us, will be known to all! To what purpose then the petty disguises and hypocrisies with which, through life, we conceal them from each other?"

Basil Annesley was more amazed to hear such a sentence issue from his mother's lips, than by all her previous amenity.

"Vardyn assures me," continued her ladyship, "that the lady whose family is eager to make you an offer of her hand, is young, lovely, accomplished, amiable, virtuous, a great heiress, warmly attached to you—"

"Warmly attached to *me*?" interrupted young Annesley;—"are you certain he said that she was warmly attached to me?"

"Quite certain!—But your interest in the fair unknown, whom just now you treated so cavalierly, seems to be suddenly increasing?"

"I am sure I know not why!"—replied Basil, with a heavy sigh, (for already the flattering whispers of his heart assured him that the desire of Osalez to unite him with one of his lovely nieces must be the origin of these singular overtures,) "for were the person referred to a thousand times more attractive and more richly endowed, the match were impossible!"

"You *know* the parties then?"

"I fear so! and am unhappily certain, dearest mother, that a less welcome daughter-in-law could not have been presented to your acceptance."

"Nevertheless," persisted Lady Annesley, "Vardyn, who is a man of the highest respectability—a man of sense, probity, feeling, though a man of the world, assures me that a more auspicious connection could not have presented itself. The uncle of the young lady is prepared to bring you into parliament and settle upon you an estate of fifteen thousand a-year!"

"Were it fifteen thousand times as much, my dear mother, suffice it that you would in the end refuse your consent!"

"You excite my curiosity beyond measure!" cried Lady Annesley. "You must indeed give me credit for unworldliness, to suppose me unbiassed by such powerful considerations!"

"I believe you to be biassed by considerations still *more* powerful," replied Basil, in a subdued voice—dreading lest she should push her inquiries to a fuller explanation.

"Alas! at the end of my career, I am come to the conclusion that no worldly interest is comparable with opulence for those we love!" replied the reclus; "money, my dear Basil, is the source of all human influences!"

"Nevertheless there are prejudices—there are resentments, which it is insufficient to overcome!" observed her son, almost trembling, as he saw the secret on the point of being extorted from his lips.

"There can be *none*, I should imagine, to bear upon the case in point," resumed the lady. "Vardyn expressly mentions that the young heiress in question is the daughter of exemplary people of unblemished character. As regards mere ancestral distinctions, I have ceased to put my trust in coronets!"

"But if she were of *Jewish* origin?" faltered Basil, almost encouraged by her moderation.

"Even then, if by faith and profession a Christian, I should not presume to raise objections," replied Lady Annesley, in a voice whose mildness was as balm to the ears of her son! "Listen to me, Basil! Even such a prejudice as you have supposed on this occasion, was the means of disuniting your mother from the object of her earliest affections—the noblest and best of human kind. A long life of affliction has not sufficed to expiate the weakness with which I suffered myself to be forced by my family into renouncing him, and bestowing my hand upon another—an honorable man—whom I did not love. But that he whose generous heart I perverted by my evil dealing disgraced himself in his turn, by retaliations which proved the means of steeping my days in anguish and remorse, and inflicting on others an injury still greater than I had inflicted on himself—I should go to the grave with the weight upon my soul of a deep and inexpiable offence!—His vengeance seems to have wrought atonement for me. But pardon me, Basil!" she continued, shuddering from head to foot with strong emotion—"it is not to *you* I must speak of this!"

"It is—*it is*!" cried the young man, casting himself at her feet and taking her trembling hands fondly in his own.—"To whom but your son—your loving and submissive son—can you unfold your griefs?—*Who* can sympathize in them like myself?—Talk to me of that early love, mother—talk to me of Cadiz—of him to whom you pledged your heart!"—

"You know all, then?" interrupted Lady Annesley, turning deathly pale, yet without attempting to withdraw from his endearments. "I foresaw that the day would come when some officious voice would interpose between us with the tale!"

"That voice, mother, was his own!"

Lady Annesley gently waved her head. "The man I speak of fell, like your father—like his happier victim—in battle! Enrolled in the Imperial army, at the battle of Austerlitz he was slain. This, *this* is all the trace that remains of him on earth!" pursued the lady, in a scarcely audible tone, taking from the desk beside her the portrait opened by her son on a former occasion,—"*How* dear,—still and ever how dear,—it becomes me not to say! Look upon that face, Basil—examine that noble—that intellectual countenance, and tell me whether it pleads nothing for the weakness of your mother."

As a pretext for averting his eyes from her own, young Annesley gazed for some moments in silence, on the picture—tracing unmistakably in every lineament the altered features of Osalez.

"After the warm and unaltered interest you have avowed, mother, in the original of this portrait," said he, at length, in as firm a voice as his beating heart would allow, "I have scarcely courage to reiterate my assertion that he lives; that but yesterday, my hand was grasped in his; that he has been my friend—my benefactor. Next to yourself, Osalez is the person who has exercised the strongest influence over the mind and conduct of your son."

Lady Annesley clasped her hands together in unspeakable emotion.

"Do not deceive me, Basil!" cried she. "Speak—speak. Let me hear those words again! He lives?—He loves you?"

"He lives—is rich, prosperous, powerful! It is the daughter of his only sister he has offered you to become my wife!"

So overpowering was the revolution created in Lady Annesley's mind by the startling intelligence thus communicated, that for a time the prospects of the two families were cruelly overclouded by the danger of one who had loved much, and suffered in proportion to the strength of her affections. The sorrows of a long series of years—the vain and fruitless sorrows seemed to have exercised less influence over her stern and powerful nature than this unlooked-for dawn of brighter days. The tender nursing of her son—the assiduous of those who hastened down from Barlingham at his summons to receive what she believed to be a last farewell, at length restored her to herself. But it was not possible to disavow in health the fond avowals of that parting hour.

Not that Lady Annesley evinced an ungenerous desire to recall the concessions she had accorded. The marriage of Basil with his beloved Esther was sanctioned by her presence and benediction; and immediately after the ceremony, the young couple took possession of a beautiful estate in Berkshire, settled on them by the munificence of Mrs. Annesley's generous kinsman. It was the earnest desire of both that the man to whom they were indebted for their happiness should become their honored inmate. But immediately after witnessing the solemnization of their marriage, Abednego Osalez abruptly quitted England, without fixing any definite period for his return.

Basil Annesley, satisfied that his unexpected departure was the result of a long and painful interview with the object of his early affection, in which, with all the firmness and dignity peculiar to her character, Lady Annesley intimated the impossibility of a nearer connection between those whom the decrees of Providence appeared expressly to have kept asunder, entertains little expectation of his friend's return to England. Esther, on the contrary, attributes his absence to the desire of extricating her father from the political feuds in which the rashness of poor Verelst had involved him in his native province, previous to negotiating a marriage between Salome and her plighted lover the young Count von Ehrenstein, at present debarred by the opposition of his family from claiming her hand.

Lady Annesley, who, though a frequent visitor to her son, persists in retaining her gloomy residence at Barlingham, listens without comment to the surmises of the family. With the discernment generated by a more intimate insight into his character, she is probably aware that the absence of Osalez will be prolonged only till he has been enabled to break off all ties that connect him with his past calling and interests. Active and trustworthy agents are, in fact, already charged with powers to concentrate and realize his singularly scattered property, with a view to the reinvestment of the enormous capital in a landed estate; and should time and reflection avail to soften the obduracy of one, through life the ruling influence of his conduct, a change of name, connected with this proprietorship, may possibly still farther tend to obliterate, in the accomplished country gentleman, all trace of the Money-lender A. O.

END OF ABEDNEGO THE MONEY-LENDER.

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